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# KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

*The Good Tidings of the Gospel*

AUGUSTINE STOCK O.S.B.

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## The Good News

THE word gospel comes from the early English gödspell (good tidings), which in turn closely translates a Greek word, euangelion.

Apart from its association with the Old Testament, euangelion meant a reward for good news, and then it came to stand for the good news itself. The term could be quite devoid of religious meaning and appears several times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) in this sense. But the ancients were less inclined to separate the sacred and the profane than we are today. Scholars have convincingly argued therefore that euangelion had a religious connotation even in classical Greek.

"It meant the sacrifice offered on the receipt of good news, thanking the gods for the message which, usually, was proclaimed from the temple steps. In the first century before our Lord it came to mean the good news itself: but it is still religious in tone because it is commonly used of events connected with the 'divine' emperor—accession or victory or birth of a royal son, or a visit for which all roads to the privileged town were to be repaired, the paths made straight and the rough places plain."<sup>1</sup>

Thus euangelion was predisposed even in classical times for use in a religious sense. Yet its special consideration results from the fact that its verb form, euangelizesthai, was used in the Greek



translation of certain key passages of II Isaiah which proved to be connecting links between the Old and New Testaments.

In the first part of the book of Isaiah (cc 1-30), Israel is still living in Judah under the kings of the house of David, Jerusalem is still regarded as the Lord's city that he will not allow to fall, and the temple is still standing. But in the latter part of the book (II Is, cc 40-66) a radical change in the historical situation is apparent. Judah is desolate, the temple lies in ruin, and the people are in Babylonian exile. The Assyrians, Israel's scourge in Isaiah's day, are no longer a menace. Babylonia is mistress of the world and even her rule seems to be nearing an end. Cyrus of Persia, the Lord's "shepherd and messiah" (44:28; 45:1), will soon decree a return from exile and a rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple.

While Isaiah of Jerusalem spoke the language of warning and rebuke, II Isaiah is "the book of consolation." A divine judgment has occurred, Israel has been punished. Now II Isaiah proclaims a message of pardon, deliverance and restoration for a despairing people. From beginning to end his work tells of the good news. The prophet's message and language are later appropriated by the evangelists to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come.

The opening poem of II Isaiah (40:1-11) provides the setting and strikes the dominant mood for the entire collection. The calling to the prophetic office had come to Isaiah in a vision of the Lord presiding over the heavenly council and commissioning the prophet to proclaim a message of judgment upon an unresponsive people (Is 6:1-13).

Appropriately the heavenly council is again in session at the beginning of II Isaiah, but the declaration that Yahweh now makes is one of consolation and hope:

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"Comfort, comfort my people"  
says our God.  
and cry to her:  
"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem  
That her time of subjection is ended."

Is 40:1-2

One of the heavenly council responds to the divine decree:

A voice cries: "Prepare in the wilderness  
a way for the Lord  
Make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.  
Let every valley be filled in,  
and every mountain and hill brought low.

Is 40:3-4

The Lord has come like a conquering king to lead his exiled people to their homeland. In exultant language the introductory poem sweeps to its climax and conclusion in v 9-11. The scene shifts from heaven to earth, from the heavenly council to Jerusalem. The city is addressed as a herald and commissioned to proclaim the good news of the Lord's coming. Ascending a high mountain she must announce that the Lord is coming in might.

Climb to the top of a high mountain,  
Oh Sion, herald of good tidings (eu-angelizomenos)  
Shout with a great shout,  
Oh Jerusalem, herald of good tidings.

Is 40:9

Eu-angelizomenos is the participle ("one announcing good news") of the verb form. The coming of the Lord is nothing other than the day of the Lord—the day on which the Lord's will shall be fully realized. This will be the day of salvation since it is the Lord's will to save.

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The next passage in which the roots of "gospel" appear underlines this day of the Lord. In imagery drawn from the field of battle the prophet describes the Lord coming to assert his sovereignty.

How beautiful upon the mountains,  
are the feet of him who brings glad tidings,  
who announces peace, who brings good news,  
who announces salvation  
who says to Sion:  
"Your God rules."

Is 52:7

The second Isaiah "plumbs still greater depths, but the eschatological event which it is his prophetic function to proclaim (40:1-11) is here more powerfully and clearly portrayed than anywhere else."<sup>2</sup>

The next "gospel" passage in II Isaiah is of special interest because it has evidently helped to shape Matthew's infancy narrative. Here the prophet describes the eschatological event, the day of the Lord, in the most characteristic imagery of his own near eastern world:

A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;  
To you shall come the men of Saba  
bringing gold and frankincense,  
and proclaiming (eu-angelizesthai) the praise of the Lord.

Is 60:6

The last "gospel" passage in II Isaiah is of crucial importance since the New Testament records that Jesus himself sought out this text<sup>3</sup> and proclaimed its fulfillment in himself. In the be-

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ginning of his public ministry Jesus came to Nazareth "where he had been brought up" (Lk 4:16). Upon entering the synagogue on the sabbath he accepted an invitation to read and preach. A roll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him and Jesus sought out the passage which reads:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me;  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor;  
to proclaim release to the captives.<sup>4</sup>

Is 58:6

Thus, according to Luke, a proclamation that he is the fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy stands at the head of Jesus' ministry. The messiah has come and with him the kingdom of God. "The Gospel writers leave us in little doubt that it was Jesus himself who first used the expression 'to preach the Gospel' of his own proclamation, and that he interpreted it as a fulfillment of Isaianic prophecy, even if such uses of 'gospel' as Mk 8:35 and 10:29 reflect its later technical connotation in a missionary Church."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus' use of the word in the verb rather than the noun form is also a vivid reminder that for him gospel was an oral message—his own proclamation that the fullness of time had come, that he was the promised messiah, and that all men must decide for or against him. Matthew and Mark both record that Jesus began his Galilean ministry with the proclamation: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:14).

It is recorded of Jesus that only once did he write and even then "he wrote on sand" (Jn 8:6). And as far as we know he did

not command his apostles to write. The Church existed for some thirty years or so before the gospels came into existence. The Church of the word existed before the Church of the book. Jesus was its cornerstone, not the written gospels, however highly we may value them. It is a mistake therefore to imagine that we can get back to primitive Christianity by discarding everything but the written scriptures.

A Christian is asked not only to profess an abstract doctrine but also to be devoted to an actual person, Jesus. "When one leaves behind a literary work, there is a very human temptation to forget the man and to consider only the work, or at least to consider the man as secondary, and to study him only insofar as his psychology helps us to understand the written text."<sup>6</sup>

It was the apostles' task to complete the organization of the Church. This Church was to be not a conglomerate of individuals but an organization, a body with head and members properly articulated. Once the principle had been established that to separate oneself from that body was to lose contact with Christ, the writing could safely begin. Coming before the scriptures the Church was now in a position to judge, recognize and interpret them.

In Jesus' own day the gospel or good news of salvation was an oral message: the kingdom of God is here, the messianic age has begun. For the first few decades of the infant Church the gospel remained an oral message, only now it became a succinct statement of the relationship between Jesus and the kingdom that had lately become evident.

In a real sense the Church, by the power conferred upon her

by Jesus, both formulated an oral gospel and oversaw the involved process of putting that gospel into writing. Every stage of this process is interesting and instructive.

When Jesus began his public ministry he entered a world that felt acutely the need for salvation. Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, and in some sense his mere presence effected this salvation, a salvation to be fully realized in the final judgment.

When the people as a whole failed to respond to this proclamation Jesus devoted his attention to a small band of disciples. His loving instruction reached its high point in Peter's avowal at Caesarea Philippi: "You are the Christ" (Mt 16:16; Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20). "Before the disciples can grasp the mystery of his divinity, they must pass through the dark night of His passion and death, experience those momentous meetings with the risen Lord, and receive the Holy Spirit in their baptism with the Pentecostal fire. The Johannine discourse after the Last Supper underscores the necessity for such a long and arduous approach to the supreme messianic secret. As long as Jesus remained with them, the disciples' loyalty to Him rested upon too human grounds. Before they could attain the knowledge of His divinity, this natural 'faith' in Jesus as the Christ must suffer a total eclipse through the terrible events which culminated in Calvary."<sup>7</sup>

Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, it would seem, to restore their "faith" in him as the messiah, and to raise this "faith" to a more supernatural level, as a step toward solidifying their faith in him. He reminds them of his teachings during his public life—teachings that should have made it possible for them to understand why he had to die even though he was the

messiah. "What has happened is the realization of what I told you when I was still with you: that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms was bound to be fulfilled. . . . And this is what is written: that the messiah should suffer and rise from the dead on the third day" (Lk 24:44, 46).

And when speaking of faith in the risen Jesus the evangelists use expressions which hint that this faith had been raised to a more supernatural level. Matthew reports that when the apostles saw the risen Jesus "they fell prostrate before him; others however doubted" (Mt 24:18). After Jesus had vanished from the sight of the two young men at Emmaus they asked one another: "Did we not feel our hearts on fire while he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32). When he instructed the eleven concerning his earlier teachings "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (v 46). Yet Jesus knew that a new dimension had to be added to the apostles' faith before they could carry out their mission as witnesses to all they had seen. "You are witnesses of these things. And mark this: I shall send down upon you what my Father has promised. So stay here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:48-49).

The apostles' faith was still imperfect, however, as typified by the question they put to Jesus during the apparition: "Is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:16). Even at this point they had not fully grasped the supernatural nature of the kingdom of God; they were still cherishing the dream of an earthly theocracy. The ascension of

Jesus into heaven constitutes the next important step in the revelation of salvation. This final departure shattered the apostles' hopes of an earthly kingdom, just as the crucifixion had shattered their hopes of an earthly messiah. Before his final departure Jesus told the apostles that they should remain in Jerusalem until they received power from above, after which they would have a task to perform. "You will receive a power, that of the Holy Spirit, who will come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Pentecost was the great turning point. Although Jesus heralded the heavenly kingdom by a multitude of saving acts there is real truth in the adage that Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. The coming of the Holy Spirit gave the apostles and those gathered with them a full understanding of Christian salvation and changed them from a fearful band cowering in an upper room into fearless propagandists for the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. On Pentecost day Peter begins at last to preach the gospel—the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus.

Let us imagine ourselves in Peter's place on Pentecost morning when, the final preparations having been made, the last bit of evidence fitted into place, the time had come for the proclamation of the good news of salvation to the world. How was he to put all the truths of the faith into one ecstatic proclamation so that all who heard might grasp its essential nature in its very proclamation, and in hearing believe, and by believing find salvation? The problem of course was solved for Peter by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In a few terse phrases Peter proclaims the sum and substance



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of the gospel (Acts 2:14-41).<sup>8</sup> These men are not drunk, he declares. What you see and hear results from that outpouring of the Spirit that the prophets had foretold for the end time.<sup>9</sup> All this happens in and through Jesus of Nazareth. He was a man singled out by God and made known to you through miracles, portents and signs. But you handed him over to the Romans who crucified and killed him. But he has risen from the grave. "God has raised him up, this Jesus: of that we are all witnesses. And now, exalted at the right hand of God, he has received the Holy Spirit from the Father, as was promised, and he has poured the Spirit forth. This is what you see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33). Peter meant that this Jesus is not only the promised messiah but that he is also divine. He can be addressed by the name which in the Old Testament was reserved for God alone—the Lord, *kyrios*. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified!" (v 36).

All this has an eminently practical consequence. All sinners who wish to claim their share in the salvation of the end time must do penance, as Jesus had insisted, and have faith in him as the risen Lord. "Repent, and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v 38).

Motivated by these newfound convictions, the apostles were fully equipped to carry out the mission about which Jesus had spoken before his ascension—that they were to be "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8); that they were "to go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). They had just witnessed the culmination

of Israel's sacred history; they were now to participate in the consummation of the messianic hopes of the Old Testament. Jesus had made the necessary immediate preparation during his public ministry and now the messianic era was ushered in by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The apostles experienced the Holy Spirit as a mysterious presence in their midst, a presence neither of the Lord Jesus exalted to the right hand of the Father, nor of the Father who has exalted the Lord Jesus by his right hand. The Spirit's abiding activity, intimate and delicate, postulated the presence of a divine person. The Spirit was part of their community, assisting them to bear witness. "We are witnesses of these things, we and the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32). The apostles therefore were the true remnant toward which the Old Testament had been striving, the qahal, the assembly or church of the saved.

The gospel thus came into existence, but this appearance was quite apart from writing. The gospel was good news to be proclaimed. Kerygma, the Greek word for proclamation, became the technical term for the good news of salvation in this earliest, oral form. The kerygma of the Jerusalem Church already contained the basic elements of the gospels and the basic realities of our faith. "Salvation had been definitively acquired for the human race by Jesus of Nazareth through His mortal life, death and resurrection. It had been revealed to mankind only in His exaltation, which was itself manifested through the descent of the Holy Spirit, Whose presence, in turn, had made of the disciples the messianic congregation of the new Israel. The OT promise of salvation had been fulfilled in the unexpected disclosure of Jesus' divinity and the divine personality of the Holy Spirit. The King-

dom of God had become a heavenly reality by the conferring upon Jesus of the divine Name Kyrios: it had been inaugurated upon earth by the new presence in the community of the Spirit, Who thus bestowed on the disciples their vocation as the Remnant."<sup>10</sup>

Convinced that the messianic era had begun, the apostles were fully prepared to carry out their assigned mission of bearing witness to the risen Lord. But the needs and conditions of this mission over the next half century determined that this gospel be gradually put into writing. Some acquaintance with the how and wherefore and the principal stages of that process will make it much easier for us to understand and interpret what we now know as the gospels.

Of the historical events to which the apostolic testimony bears witness, the resurrection of Christ occupies the central position. All the titles conferred on Jesus would have been groundless if the resurrection did not happen. "If Christ has not been raised, then our kerygma is null and void, and so is your faith," Paul wrote the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:14). And in the course of time the other elements of the primitive kerygma were eventually absorbed in the paschal mystery until it stood forth as the primordial object of Christian faith.

In his Pentecost sermon Peter's proclamation centered on two basic themes: the experience of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus. These themes constitute two of the three basic elements of the primitive kerygma. The missing theme—eschatology and the second coming—will be discussed later. Without trying to decide at once precisely how or when this parousia expectation arose, we can say that no one would question the fact

that it became part of the kerygma in the very earliest days of the Church.

Within a very short time therefore the primitive kerygma came to consist of three basic elements: experience of the Holy Spirit, faith in the mystery of Easter and hope of the coming of the Lord. In the course of the Church's first decades emphasis shifted from one element to another. At first the experience of the Spirit seems to have been the starting point for the kerygma. Not that this was the substance of the gospel, but rather its sign and seal. Paul's epistles show that a preoccupation with the gift of the Spirit led to some distortions and abuses and that certain measures had to be taken to bring it into focus. When we reach the stage of our written gospels the experience of the Spirit is mentioned only in passing.

Speculations about the second coming caused even more consternation. It had been made clear that Jesus was to come again but no timetable had been given. In the beginning many Christians thought that Jesus was to come again very soon and such an expectation cannot but shape a person's life. So strong was this expectation that it threatened to cast the Easter mystery into the shadows, and so the second coming had to be reduced to its proper proportions.

In the course of time these first and the last elements of the primitive kerygma were legitimately absorbed into the resurrection, the primary object of faith. The experience of the Spirit in the primitive Church flows from and points to the resurrection, and the resurrection in turn is the pledge of our entrance into the kingdom of glory when the Lord will come to judge.

Thus it comes about that the resurrection projects its light over

all elements of the gospel traditions, over events that both precede and follow it. But while the outpouring of the Spirit and the second coming of Jesus are put into the background, they must remain on the horizon of the modern reader of the gospels if he is to maintain the perspective of the first hearers of the good news of salvation, for whom these elements of the primitive kerygma were of such great importance.

## From Kerygma to Gospels

THE apostles were convinced that the messianic age had arrived by the presence of the Spirit and the exaltation of the risen Lord—two events of the supernatural order which were at the same time interventions in human history. In carrying out Jesus' injunction to give testimony the apostles had to bear witness to certain events which were primarily of the historical order and, as such, they necessarily occupied a place in the kerygma. But from the very beginning we must note that the apostolic testimony viewed these events in a way that differs somewhat from the modern historical approach. For while dealing with events that actually happened, the apostolic testimony was especially interested in showing what part these events play in God's plan of salvation.

History is never a mere catalog of events. History always implies some interpretation. In the apostolic testimony—and this remains true in varying degrees for gospel tradition as a whole—events were interpreted from the point of view of salvation, and at times the interpretation was pronounced.

Another quality of the apostolic testimony that perdures in gospel tradition is that it bore witness to events rather than offered proof. The apostles know what they saw; they were there and they affirmed what they saw with the authority that had been

given them. They made no particular effort to prove that these events actually happened, but they constantly asserted that it was their duty to attest to their reality. "Proof is in place (and is sufficient) where there is question of truth in the merely intellectual order."<sup>1</sup> Testimony on the other hand bears witness to events in order to elicit faith and demands an engagement of the whole man, mind, heart and will.

When we compare the primitive kerygma with our written gospels, certain differences in addition to the oral nature of the kerygma are brought home to us. "We notice immediately that what might be called the biographical element is reduced to a minimum and that the theological note is struck straight away!"<sup>2</sup> Beyond asserting the reality of the death and resurrection the kerygma makes little reference to the other events of Jesus' public life. Nor was it necessary. The main features of the public ministry must have been well known to those to whom the kerygma was first proclaimed.

But as the good news spread from Jerusalem to Palestine and beyond it became necessary for preachers to recall some of the things that Jesus had said and done, and to add them to the kerygma, especially for the benefit of those not otherwise acquainted with the life of Jesus. A brief summary of this life appears in Acts 10:34-43 (Peter's speech in the house of Cornelius) and 13:16-41 (Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch).

Thus gospel tradition began to expand in the most natural way. Gradually, a general sketch of the public life was construed, with the emphasis of course on the theological meaning of events—their meaning in the plan of salvation. The inevitable extension of this process was an account of the nativity, supplied mostly

by Luke, and then the preexistence of the Word, a step taken by John. Other developments of the kerygma were also taking place and through repetition quickly and inevitably assumed stereotyped forms. These forms were also used as creeds or confessions of faith and even as hymns. Dealing with particular problems and situations in writing his epistles, Paul had frequent occasion to recall the basic elements of the kerygma. He found these primitive creeds and hymns very convenient summaries of the faith and from time to time he incorporated them into his epistles (Eph 5:17; Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tm 3:16).

One such passage in 1 Corinthians reflects the beginning of other developments in gospel tradition, such as the "appeal to scripture." Paul writes to his converts at Corinth: "Now I would remind you, my brothers, of the gospel that I announced to you. . . . I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:1, 3-4).

In this summary the Easter event is not simply adduced but is given an historical setting by the mention of the third day and is justified apologetically by the assertion that all this happened "according to the scriptures" and also, in the lines that follow, by an appeal to eyewitnesses (Cephas, five hundred, James, all the apostles, Paul himself). This example shows us what a living thing the apostolic tradition was in transmitting faithfully the fundamental mystery of faith, and at the same time adapting it to varying needs and circumstances. Paul handed on a tradition, "what I also received," yet he set it forth in a way best calculated to benefit his readers.



Christianity was not entirely new, in the sense that it had no connection with the past. Denounced for seditious acts before the procurator Felix, Paul affirmed that in adhering to Jesus he was in reality faithful to the law. "This much I will admit: it is by following the Way, which my accusers call a sect, that I serve the God of my Fathers, preserving my faith in everything laid down by the Law or written in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14). Christianity is the flowering of Judaism, the fulfillment of the Lord's revelation to mankind from creation, and more particularly from the time of Abraham, Moses and the prophets.

Therefore it was by an appeal to scripture that the apostles sought to win belief for the kerygma. In speaking to Jews they recalled God's plan of salvation and described how the events to which they bore witness were in the most authentic traditions of the fathers of Israel. All these events had been foretold, and in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension Jesus had "opened the apostles' minds to understand the scriptures" (Lk 24:46).

Since the Christian event is unintelligible apart from the Old Testament preparation, the kerygma to some extent probably never existed apart from the appeal to scripture. When the apostles began their mission of preaching under the impulsion of the Spirit, they naturally made scripture an integral part of their witness. In the kerygma he incorporated into his letter to the Corinthians Paul invoked scripture only in a most general way—all that has happened has happened "according to the scriptures." But this is readily understandable since he was writing to gentile converts who were not too well acquainted

with the Old Testament and for whom a development of the life of Jesus would be more in place. But when addressing Jewish audiences the apostles used particular texts in their witness to various aspects of the kerygma and to events in the life of Jesus. Here again the emphasis was on the basic elements of the kerygma, then the public life, then the infancy and finally the preexistence of Jesus. In the discourses Luke incorporated into his Acts of the Apostles, scriptural "proofs" are connected with particular elements of the kerygma and events of our Lord's life, and there are indications that these usages became sanctified by custom.

Thus the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days was foretold by the prophet Joel (Acts 2); and the plot against Jesus was envisioned in Ps 2: "Why did the gentiles rage, and the people lay vain plots?" (Acts 4:25). But above all the death and resurrection were foreseen in II Isaiah. Jesus was the "servant," "the just one" who was "delivered up"—all these were references to the suffering servant poems in Acts 3. Quite naturally such allusions appeared frequently in both the epistles and gospels, since Jesus had defined his mission in terms of the suffering servant poems. Jesus is also the prophet that the book of Deuteronomy said the Lord would "raise up" to his people—a double entendre that evokes the resurrection. And according to Ps 16(15):10 the Lord would not "let his holy one see corruption" (Acts 2:27), while Ps 110(109):1 affirms that the Lord had said to David's Lord, "Sit at my right hand" (Act 2:35).

The apostles were certainly not concerned about arguing in a circle, however. They did not try to prove the actuality of the

events to which they bore witness but to situate those events in the history of salvation and to explain their meaning in that context. So in their appeal to scripture the apostles and later the evangelists quoted the Old Testament with the utmost freedom. They used texts in both the literal or typical senses, switched from the Hebrew to the Greek Old Testament—depending on which gave the more apropos reading, and even adapted texts to their own purposes.

Another development in gospel tradition was dictated by the process of adopting the faith. The kerygma was the proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ to non-Christians, but it was also a plea for repentance and conversion. Whoever heeded the plea then heard the message of salvation in greater detail through that form of instruction technically known as catechesis. This form of teaching soon began to list our Lord's sayings on moral matters, and became what the scholars call not kerygma but *didaché*, not proclamation but doctrine. The *didaché* was also to be incorporated into the written gospels.

Here another instructive parallel between the old law and the new suggests itself. The Lord revealed himself in the exodus and other saving acts and made ethical demands of his people when he formed the covenant with them. They had to be as just as he was just. In the new covenant the kerygma proclaimed God's definitive saving act, and the moral obligations set forth in the *didaché* were the Lord's demands of his new people. The kerygma declared what God had done for men; the *didaché* declared what God expected man to do.

"As the old covenant rested upon the act of God in delivering Israel from Egypt, so the new covenant rests upon the act of

God in redeeming mankind through the death and resurrection of Christ. As the old covenant laid upon Israel consequential obligations which were defined in the Decalogue, and more explicitly in the whole law of Moses, so the new covenant lays consequential obligations upon the Church. The nature of these obligations corresponds to the nature of the act of God by which the new covenant was instituted. Ultimately, therefore, it corresponds to the character and purpose of God Himself."<sup>3</sup>

But it was not only our Lord's teachings that were recalled for the instruction of catechumens but his deeds as well. The events of the public life were recalled not out of purely historical interest but in order that they might serve as divine example. Jesus had commanded his apostles to re-enact the last supper "in my memory" as a sacred memorial. In the celebration of the eucharist every event of that sacred night was necessarily recalled, as were the words of Jesus. This sacramental action not only stirred up the faith of the participants but also determined how they should conduct themselves in cult, and accustomed them to the recall of the past.

This fundamental experience influenced the manner in which the other events of the life of Jesus were recalled, namely as sacred memorials. They were recalled out of fidelity to the master, a fidelity embodied in the demands of the new life. Thus the words and deeds of Jesus were recalled by the Christian as guides for living the faith at all times and in all places.

The kerygma and the catechesis began as oral teaching and to a great extent were passed on in that form for some time. But almost at once individual Christians began to put bits of this oral teaching into writing. In time these fragmentary writings

were grouped into small collections and the small collections into larger collections. At the last stage of this "putting into writing" a general editor, an evangelist, used these collections as sources for a written gospel consisting of a life of Christ prefixed to the basic elements of the primitive kerygma. In writing the life of Christ the evangelist did not abstract from his faith in the kerygma but viewed the events of this life in the light of salvation as a whole.

Concerning the oral phase of gospel tradition, it is rather difficult to conceive how this large and important body of knowledge could have been faithfully passed on in nonwritten form. An understanding of this oral phase is therefore vital to our understanding and appreciation of the written gospels. There is first of all the assurance that oral tradition was capable of handing on the Christian message with extraordinary fidelity to the essentials. Also, this oral stage left an indelible imprint on the gospel traditions that is discernible even today. Moreover, the gospels cannot be properly interpreted unless this imprint is taken into consideration.

The retentiveness and accuracy of oral tradition are commonly accepted today. Israel had made use of the combination of oral tradition, gradual writing and final editing of complete books to preserve her sacred traditions and literature—the law, the prophets, the writings, the Old Testament. The Jews were the unrivaled masters of this technique.

Oral tradition was still in full flower when Jesus began his public life. A pupil learned simply by repeating and committing to memory what his master pronounced. During the

time of Jesus that great body of rabbinic traditions one day to be given a written form in the Mishnah was being transmitted by word of mouth. The word mishnah comes from a root meaning to repeat, that is, to memorize. Everything that Jesus did and said was before an audience fully capable of remembering and passing on an accurate account of the event.

Oral transmission has its own peculiar devices and techniques, and clearly these were employed both by Jesus in his preaching and by his audience in remembering his sayings (*logia*) and his actions. These are certain oral aids "used to assist memory—rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, striking formulae, repetition, graphic comparison. Our Lord, the wise teacher, pursued this method and distinct traces of it have come down to us in our present gospels—so many witnesses to the antiquity of their sources."<sup>4</sup> Parallelism or balanced contrast, which characterizes all solemn semitic speech, pervades our Lord's discourses as reported in the gospels, and bears witness to the fundamentally Jewish character of his sayings and the fidelity of the evangelists in reporting them.

Our knowledge about oral tradition and its devices gives us the assurance, on the one hand, that it was fully capable of preserving not only a faithfully outlined life of Jesus, but also authentic facsimiles of his discourses and sayings, at times in the very words he himself used. On the other hand, the nature of oral tradition should alert us to the fact that a word-for-word repetition of what our Lord had said was not its primary goal. In fact, despite substantial identity of form and content, some rather surprising divergences are apparent when one gospel is

compared with another. The words of the Our Father are not reported identically by Matthew and Luke. Differences even appear in the words that instituted the eucharist.

Tradition passed on by word of mouth has been likened to a stone passed from hand to hand—the substance remains but the rough edges are worn smooth. Units of gospel tradition committed to writing (pericopae) and summaries of our Lord's sayings and doings "bear the mark of popular preaching and tradition in which a much repeated story is rubbed down and polished until nothing but the hard core remains in its most interesting form."<sup>5</sup> It has been said that "a 'gospel' is a theological literary form in which historical detail may remain unemphasized and general statement admitted."<sup>6</sup>

Such discrepancies would be a cause of embarrassment in a modern literary work, and so they were for commentators as long as they judged the scriptures, including the gospels, according to their own literary standards. The best they could do was try to harmonize the differences or explain them away. But when the gospels are approached on their own terms these discrepancies often prove to be valuable clues to earlier and more original texts.

Usually it is a community rather than an individual that must be regarded as the author of a particular gospel tradition. And the early Christian communities did not recall the sayings or deeds of Jesus out of a purely historical interest, but to determine how the faith was to be lived in their particular circumstances. Not only did they recall those sayings and events which they deemed most instructive—they also recalled them in the way they deemed most useful. They would emphasize that

aspect of a saying or incident they found most apropos, or shape the saying or incident in the telling with that combination of freedom and fidelity which Israel had always considered part of her sacred traditions and which was regarded as entirely legitimate. When the evangelists incorporated these passages into the gospels they were fully aware that they had been shaped in this manner in the course of oral transmission, and they found this entirely natural.

Often the evangelists were content to use a unit of gospel tradition just as it had been shaped by the interests of a particular community. Certainly it was not always their aim to strip off the shaping imparted by a particular church in the course of oral transmission in order to reproduce a word-for-word account of what Jesus said or did. They did not consider it of vital importance to smooth away the discrepancies that might arise between two different versions of one and the same incident.

There is great interest today in that period of oral transmission comprising the twenty or thirty years between the death of Jesus and the compilation and editing of the first gospel. For one thing it should be noted that men so versed in the art of oral tradition would readily recall such important events that had occurred less than half a century before. For them, half a century was a very short time. In the Old Testament Israel, standing on her integral faith in the mosaic covenant, looked back over the earlier periods of history, the patriarchal and primeval periods. But how different this was. Abraham had come half a millennium before and creation almost countless millennia before. Little wonder that the light of history grows



fainter as the attention moves backward and is replaced by theological interpretation. Standing within her own integral resurrection-faith, the Church looked back over our Lord's public life and beyond. Though it was not her aim to keep the recall of historical events entirely apart from theological interpretation, her control over the historical events was firm and sure.

Critics of a skeptical bent used to argue that the gospel traditions were changed beyond recognition during the two or three decades between Jesus' death and resurrection and the writing of the first gospel. They argued that it was impossible to bridge the gap between our written gospels and what was actually said and done. The traditions incorporated in our written gospels were regarded as almost entirely the invention of the primitive Christian communities, legendary idealizations in which historical facts were all but swallowed up. Of what value, they asked, are traditions confided to an amorphous group with little literary background and with little concern for scientific accuracy?

Actually however the gospel traditions were committed not to an anonymous collectivity but to a fully organized society with duly authorized officials, the apostles and their subordinates. The Acts of the Apostles shows them supervising every aspect of the Church's life. And since one of their primary functions was to bear witness to what they had seen and heard, the apostles would have been unfaithful to their office if they had allowed the gospel message to be disfigured in any of its essentials. Moreover, there were eyewitnesses still living who would have corrected any unjustified claims.

The Church bridges the gap between the written gospels and Jesus himself; confided to a solidly established Church the gospel

traditions were safeguarded against substantial deformation. But only an adequate concept of the Church's nature and office will explain how she understood her relationship to the gospel traditions. The Church is much more than an historical channel. Jesus endowed the Church with real power to act in his name, "to bind and loose" in the continuance of his mission of salvation. Through his Church Jesus remains a living source; his sayings and doings are pertinent for Christians of all ages and conditions. The preoccupations and interest of Christians (technically, *Sitz im Leben* or life situation) of particular communities at times influenced the precise way a gospel tradition was recalled by the Church. Since these interests varied from community to community a particular gospel tradition could have been recalled differently in each of the communities.

As the gospel was transmitted to more distant places and to later generations, its fundamental credo was adapted to the circumstances of the hearers. Speaking to Palestinian Jews Peter emphasized the messiahship of Jesus. On his missionary journeys Paul presented Jesus as a savior whose work has a more universal character. Writing in a later age and for more mature Christians John shows the value lying beneath the events of Jesus' life.

As they settled down to the day-to-day living of their newly acquired faith, the primitive Christian communities began to discover that they had questions to ask regarding the application of the faith to particular matters and circumstances. What should be the Christian's attitude toward such matters as marriage, divorce and widowhood? What of the practices of the old law? Should the gospel be preached to sinners and pagans? These and other considerations helped to determine the choice

of incidents from Jesus' life for inclusion in the presentation of the gospel. Those incidents were chosen which provided guidance in new situations in the Church. To a degree these same considerations also determined the particular way in which those incidents were recalled, the aspects that were emphasized, and the interpretation they were given in the light of contemporary problems.

"It has been thanks to recent researches that the Gospel pericopae—narratives, sayings, parables, etc.—have been plunged into the great stream of faith and life of the primitive Church. Some success has been achieved in segregating various formative influences from the primitive community in the production of our Gospels: preaching, apologetics, doctrine, liturgy."<sup>7</sup>

History-centeredness and a consciousness of the future characterize the New Testament as well as the Old. The primitive Christian community taught and interpreted even when handing on gospel traditions, but the Church was never indifferent to history. Her very *raison d'être* depended upon the truth of an historical event, the resurrection of Jesus. Taking this event as her point of departure, the Church evolved a standard outline of Jesus' life discernible in all four gospels: the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of Christ, the beginning of the Galilean ministry, healing and exorcism, the ministry in Jerusalem, the crucifixion and the resurrection. "This outline served as a framework into which anecdotes of Christ's mission, power, teaching, by some incident or memorable sayings, parable, etc., could be inserted."<sup>8</sup>

At times the evangelists brought together separate sayings in artificial units having the appearance of a single discourse. For instance, the core of Matthew's gospel is fivefold, in imitation of the Pentateuch, with each of the five parts consisting of a narrative and a discourse section. Once separate sayings and incidents are tied together by vague phrases that must be regarded more often than not as literary transitions rather than as logical or chronological affirmations. Sayings brought together in the sermon on the mount (Mt 5-7)—Matthew's first discourse section—are found scattered throughout the gospel of Luke.

This presents us with an interesting contrast. We are warned against quoting things out of context, but when we are dealing with the gospels the context first has to be proved. A saying in one gospel may be found in a different context in another. This is a strong indication that the context may not cast much light on the meaning of the passage. Our first three gospels have been compared to so many beads on a string. The beads, the self-contained gospel passages, may be displaced without losing their significance. The string, the connecting passages, usually concerned with place or time, is of secondary value. In the gospels what appear to be chronological notes are in reality often mere literary transitions.

In his *Apostolic Preaching* C. H. Dodd writes that the detailed narrative in Mark's gospel appears "chiefly in the form of more or less detached episodes, loosely strung upon the thread of an outline whose form can be recognized in the comparatively colorless summaries which link the episodes together."<sup>9</sup>

Scholars generally agree that the process of putting the traditions into writing began when the gospel was proclaimed out-

side Palestine and more immediately with the deaths of eye-witnesses. The early written accounts probably served as catechetical aids for preachers and catechists in their missionary work. Written accounts of previously isolated incidents were grouped together according to some chronological or systematic scheme, and small collections were combined to become larger collections. Thus the gospel passed through the stages of kerygma, fragmentary writings in both Aramaic and Greek, written gospels and a final editing process.

Our present gospels were edited one after the other and it is almost certain that later writers made use of already existing gospels. The interrelationship of our written gospels (those by Matthew, Mark and Luke, at least) is known as the synoptic problem. The sequence seems to have begun with an abbreviated form of Matthew's gospel, first in Aramaic and then in Greek (c AD 50), followed by Mark's gospel (c AD 65), and then Matthew's gospel before and Luke's gospel after the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> The later two gospels seem to have drawn on a source—designated technically as Q and not used by Mark—that contained various sayings of our Lord.

Noting the remarkably small trace the destruction of Jerusalem left upon the New Testament, C. F. D. Moule conjectures that one reason "may perhaps be that there is extremely little in the New Testament later than AD 70. It has yet to be demonstrated beyond doubt that Matthew's gospel is later. . . . Luke-Acts may or may not be after the event."<sup>11</sup> And in the same vein he later observes: "So far as full Gospels go, therefore, we cannot be certain of more than that Mark's Gospel was written well within the natural life span of the apostolic generation—though

in fact the most plausible dating of Matthew, Luke and John places them also within this era."<sup>12</sup>

Mark's gospel may be regarded as an expanded form of the historical section of the kerygma as exemplified by Acts 10 and 13 and, despite first appearances, John's gospel is fundamentally the same. The theological interpretation is much more pronounced in John but it is interpretation of the same basic events in the traditional order. "It is, however, in the Fourth Gospel that we return to the main line of development which runs through Mark from the original apostolic Preaching."<sup>13</sup>

Matthew and Luke on the other hand emphasize points other than those which constituted the basic elements of the kerygma. For example Matthew emphasized the theme of fulfillment by citing prophecies which he regarded as fulfilled in various episodes of the life of Jesus. But what is more important, Matthew presented the gospel as the new law of the kingdom. In addition to the marcan narrative Matthew's gospel contains "a large collection of sayings of Jesus, arranged so as to form a fairly systematic account of His teaching. It is presented as a new Law given by the Messianic King. In the apostolic Preaching, as we have seen, there is only slight allusion to the work of Jesus as Teacher. The incorporation of this fresh material has the effect of modifying in some degree the character in which Christianity is presented. It is not so much a Gospel of 'realized eschatology,' as a new and higher code of ethics. This change was natural enough; for when it became necessary to readjust the Christian outlook to the indefinite postponement of the second advent and judgment, the Church had to organize itself as a permanent society living the life of the redeemed people of God in an un-

redeemed world. Everything, therefore, in the tradition of the teaching of Jesus which could afford guidance for the conduct of the community in this situation came to be of special value. Matthew is, in fact, no longer in the pure sense a 'gospel.' It combines kerygma with didaché, and if we regard the book as a whole the element of didaché predominates."<sup>14</sup>

The gospels then combine history and theological interpretation, although they are essentially works of doctrine and not biographies. "The purpose of the evangelists themselves is less biographical than theological."<sup>15</sup> The gospels contain neither an appraisal of Jesus' character nor a description of his external appearance. They are incomplete and do not relate events in their strict chronological order. Geographical and topographical details are sketchy and few in number. And not one of the evangelists attempted to describe the crucifixion.

Therefore, although the gospels relate actual events, history was not the prime concern of the evangelists. Written to serve the Christian mission, the gospels were at one and the same time written forms of early Christian preaching and aids to further that preaching. Their purpose was to stir up and to confirm faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel narratives are colored throughout by religious evaluations of the events they record. Although recording actual occurrences the gospels betray their authors' conviction that these occurrences have a meaning above and beyond the usual order of things. At all times they view these events as part of the Lord's supernaturally revealed and realized plan of salvation.

"Now in the mind of the primitive Church Christ was not a

person of the past but the risen Lord, present with his will and power, the one who now offered salvation. The formulas of its preaching in relating his history declare that he is and not that he was. What has taken place is understood according to its present such as God made it, opening out into the future according to His design. The earthly revelation of Jesus is still an actual revelation and in this perspective his words are dressed with the concerns of the Church."<sup>16</sup>

In the Old Testament revelation came through "mighty acts of the Lord"—historical events understood as religiously significant—and the New Testament is no less history-centered. The faith required of the primitive Church was based on historical facts, but the Church did not invent these facts; she interpreted them. The Christian faith and history were indissolubly linked and for the evangelists faith was true only insofar as it corresponded with its true historical context. Thus the formative influence of the primitive Church and the theological interpretation in the gospels do not diminish the person, life and sayings of Jesus. "Theology and history have been interwoven, perhaps inextricably, and while it is necessary to search for history in the kerygma, it is also necessary to discover the kerygma in history."<sup>17</sup>

At one time it was the fashion to make a severe distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. According to this distinction the Christ of faith was the picture of Jesus that emerged from the theological interpretation in the New Testament. The Jesus of history was the picture that resulted if the New Testament were stripped of all theological interpretation and the formative influence of the primitive Church. Some scholars even claimed for a time that the two pictures were



mutually exclusive. Now, however, it is recognized that interpretation was not necessarily perversion for it brought out implications in the tradition that would have been lost in a more purely factual account. And these implications may be indispensable to a complete understanding of the gospel tradition.

In fact a purely factual account shorn of all implications and interpretation would have been bad history. Seeking the "historical Jesus" scholars attempted for a time to write lives of Jesus by cutting away from the gospel records everything that seemed to reflect later Christian beliefs. The Jesus that emerged from these historical reconstructions was a person who, regardless of whatever he was claimed to be, could never have occupied the place in history that Jesus undoubtedly fills.<sup>18</sup>

Theological interpretation was included in the gospels because testimony designed to arouse faith could not have been mere repetition of the deeds and sayings of Jesus. The evangelists interpreted his life in the general context of God's plan of salvation. Yet "it may be claimed, within their limitations, the Gospels, while always subject to literary and historical criticism, are a reliable guide to the study of the mind and purpose of Jesus and to the turning points of his ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem. They do not tell us all we should wish to know, and many problems remain unsolved, but we are not left in darkness with no resort but to consider how the primitive Christian communities interpreted his person and mission. In the Gospels, Jesus himself can be seen and the outlines of his ministry can be traced, provided we have courage, imagination, and insight to read the primitive records aright."<sup>19</sup>

## Beatitudes: Two Versions

THE gospel traditions that found their way into our canonical gospels were usually shaped to some degree by their passage through a stage of oral transmission and by the formative influence of the Church, which adapted the traditions to the needs and circumstances of particular localities. Consequently, in gospel literature, facts and saying are not in every instance to be taken as rigorously exact reproductions of what actually happened.<sup>1</sup> "‘Gospel’ is a theological literary form in which historical detail may remain unemphasised and general statement admitted."<sup>2</sup>

Gospel traditions appear with variations in the written gospels. Far from being an embarrassment, these variations are clues to both the preoccupations of various Christian communities and, when compared, to what was actually said or done. Variations are found in the words of the Our Father, for example, as reported by Matthew and Luke and, as noted above, differences appear even in the words that instituted the eucharist.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul several times distinguishes between his own opinion and the "commandment of the Lord" which is absolutely authoritative (1 Cor 7:8–12, 25, 40). Discussing marriage and the relations of the sexes, Paul drew a clear distinction between his own opinions and the commandment of the Lord forbidding divorce. "To the married I give this ruling,

which is not mine but the Lord's: a wife must not separate from her husband—if she does, she must either remain single or be reconciled to her husband—and that the husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Cor 7:1-11).

This same commandment of the Lord appears in each of the first three gospels in somewhat different verbal forms. Mark 10:11-12: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Luke 16:18: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Matthew 19:9: "Whoever divorces his wife, except in the case of an illegitimate union, and marries another, commits adultery."

Touching on the question of the support of missionaries, Paul first offered his own opinion and then clinched the matter by recalling that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should have their living from the gospel" (1 Cor 9:17). The saying he was referring to appears in the gospels in two slightly different verbal forms. Luke 10:7: "The worker deserves his wages." Matthew 10:10: "The worker deserves his keep."

"From these two passages, apart from other less direct but quite cogent evidence, we conclude, first, that the early church possessed a tradition of the sayings of Jesus at a date earlier than the composition of the Gospels; secondly, that this tradition was so firmly established and so universally accepted that appeal to it was final; thirdly, that while the sayings were acknowledged as authoritative in substance, the precise wording

was not necessarily fixed, since in each of these cases we have at least three different verbal forms of the same saying; and, fourthly, that at least some of these traditional sayings were later embodied in our Gospels."<sup>3</sup>

The beatitudes are among the most obvious examples where two evangelists differed in reporting the words of our Lord. Study of the two reports has proved to be particularly interesting and instructive. Dom Jacques Dupont of Saint-André Abbey, Belgium has written an outstanding work on the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew has eight or possibly nine beatitudes, and Luke has four beatitudes and four woes or maledictions. There are a number of phrases in Matthew's version that are not found in Luke's and which give the former a meaning quite different from the beatitudes in Luke.

The task of the evangelists was to proclaim the gospel, not to transmit a stenographic account of Jesus' words. But they were also concerned that his acts and words play a vital role in the lives of the Christians for whom they were writing. What Jesus had said and done never belonged entirely to the past. They remained perennially contemporary, full of meaning for daily life.<sup>5</sup>

It was only natural that the apostolic age left its imprint on gospel tradition. "The evangelists write in the Church and for the Church; they belong to the community. As they conceived it, their task did not consist precisely in re-establishing remembrances about Jesus in their original state, separating them from the overtones they had taken on from tradition. Far from wishing to eliminate the work of elaboration brought about by tradition, they set about completing it and consecrating it."<sup>6</sup>

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

*The Beatitudes and Woes*

Mt 5:3-12

Lk 6:20b-26

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit,<br>for theirs is the kingdom<br>of heaven.  | 20b Blessed are you poor, for<br>yours is the kingdom of<br>God.   |
| 4 Blessed are the meek, for they<br>shall inherit the earth.  |  |
| 5 Blessed are those who mourn<br>for they shall be comforted.   | 21 Blessed are you who hunger<br>now, for you shall be satis-<br>fied.   |
| 6 Blessed are they who hunger<br>and thirst for justice, for<br>they shall be satisfied.  | Blessed are you that weep<br>now, for you shall laugh.   |
| 7 Blessed are the merciful, for<br>they shall obtain mercy.   |  |
| 8 Blessed are the pure in heart,<br>for they shall see God.   |  |
| 9 Blessed are the peacemakers,<br>for they shall be called the<br>children of God.  |  |
| 10 Blessed are they who have suf-<br>fered persecution for justice'<br>sake, for theirs is the king-<br>dom of heaven.  |  |
| 11 Blessed are you when men<br>insult you and utter all<br>kinds of evil against you<br>falsely on my account. Re-<br>joice and be glad, for<br>your reward is great in<br>heaven: in the same way<br>men persecuted the proph-<br>ets who were before you. | 22 Blessed are you when men<br>hate you, and exclude you<br>from their company and<br>insult you, and ban your<br>very name as infamous, on<br>account of the Son of Man!<br>Rejoice on that day and<br>leap for joy, for behold,<br>your reward is great in<br>heaven: in just the same<br>way did their fathers treat<br>the prophets. |

BEATITUDES: TWO VERSIONS

- 24 But woe to you, the rich!  
for you have received your  
consolation.
- 25 Woe to you who are filled  
now, for you will go  
hungry.
- Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you shall mourn and  
weep.
- 26 Woe to you when all men  
speak well of you: in just  
the same way did their  
fathers treat the prophets.

To understand the gospel texts fully we must take into account the entire process of which they were the culmination. Gospel texts, says Dupont, can have a threefold depth. These are the levels of the redactor's or evangelist's intentions, the intentions of apostolic tradition and the intentions of Jesus himself.

The evangelist's purpose and audience in writing the gospel certainly influenced his selection and ordering of material; and his initiatives were sanctioned by the charism of inspiration. But the evangelist's intentions were only the prolongation of an earlier intention—that is, apostolic tradition. Jesus had established the Church and endowed it with real power and authority to continue his saving mission. And his own thoughts and intentions, clothed with divine authority, gave meaning to the apostolic and evangelical intentions.

By distinguishing these three levels of intentions, it is possible to come to a better understanding of Jesus' own words. Yet isolating these words and rejecting apostolic tradition and the intentions of the evangelists should by no means be the primary

object of this kind of study. Each level of meaning is genuine and sacred, and our object should be to appreciate all three in this context.

All three levels of meaning, of course, are not always present in the gospel text although, on the other hand, the stage of apostolic tradition may at times be complex and diversified, and representing several successive or concomitant forms of a single tradition.

There are two quite different versions of the beatitudes in the synoptic gospels. Dupont opines that the differences arose on the third level—that they originated with the evangelists and expressed their particular viewpoint and preoccupations. The versions by Matthew and Luke were based on a written source, common on the whole with minor variations, which represented the level of apostolic tradition. But in this case the apostolic tradition apparently did not differ from Jesus' own intentions and the situations of his public ministry.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew and Luke received the beatitudes along with the sermon on the mount, of which the beatitudes are the prologue. In line with his longer version of the beatitudes, Matthew's version of the sermon on the mount is considerably longer than Luke's (107 to 30 verses). Evidently, Matthew introduced into his sermon on the mount material that Luke introduced into the middle of his gospel (cc 9-18). This was in accordance with Matthew's general tendency to group together all of Jesus' sayings on any one subject, thus constructing long discourses by patching together, often imperfectly, elements from different sources. Five such discourses are found in the main body of his gospel.

It seems likely that in the common source which Matthew and Luke both used two incidents appeared in the sermon on the mount before the beatitudes. These were a short summary of Jesus' Galilean activity and an account of the institution of the twelve apostles. Luke reversed the order of the two events but there are rather clear indications that he did so deliberately. Given immediately after the institution of the twelve, the discourse in question was probably addressed solely to them. Some particulars in the two versions indicate a larger audience but this exaggeration was a general tendency among the evangelists.

An examination of the beatitudes common to the two versions reveals some highly significant differences. For example Matthew has: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" while Luke wrote: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." And we have Matthew's: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice," to Luke's: "Blessed are you who hunger now."

Slight as they are, these differences give the two versions quite different meanings and each version is in accord with the gospel in which it is found. Consider Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" where Luke has "kingdom of God." Out of reverence Jews of the time avoided pronouncing the Lord's name. They said Adonai instead of Yahweh, and they had other substitutes; heaven was one. "Kingdom of heaven" was the direct equivalent of "kingdom of God." The former was entirely appropriate for Matthew's Judeo-Christian audience, but it would have been an unfamiliar phrase for the Greek audience that Luke was writing for, since the Greeks were less versed in the Old Testament.

According to Matthew the beneficiaries of the promise were "the poor in spirit," while in Luke they were simply "the poor."



On the basis of parallelism alone it appears that "in spirit" was added by Matthew. Furthermore, when the beatitudes are printed in the parallel verse form so characteristic of semitic expression, some phrases in Matthew upset the regular parallel structure ("in spirit," v 3; "for justice," v 6; "for justice' sake," v 10).

Let us presuppose that the common source used by Matthew and Luke had the short, ambiguous form: "Blessed are the poor." Writing for a Greek audience, Luke knew that they would not connect poor with any special Old Testament idea of poverty. They would understand it either as the social condition of poverty or as the practice of asceticism and renunciation. Moreover these aspects of poverty are a part of the central pre-occupations of Luke's gospel, and it was not characteristic of Luke to make deliberate changes in the sources he incorporated into his gospel.

But with the addition of the words in spirit the redactor of canonical Matthew transferred the beatitude from the social and ascetical realm to the realm of moral practice. This was all the more natural since use of the phrase in Dead Sea literature indicates that it was not entirely an innovation. And every aspect of his gospel illustrates Matthew's intention to present the gospel as a moral teaching, a catechism, a handbook of Christian morality. Aware of the ambiguity of the word poor Matthew added the words in spirit, giving the beatitude a precise spiritual meaning, making it a moral virtue for Christian practice.

These conclusions are underlined in the next beatitude that the two versions have in common. Matthew reads: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice," while Luke has: "Blessed are you who hunger now." Matthew's addition "for

justice" makes the hunger metaphorical, an attitude of soul. In Luke on the other hand hunger is used in the ordinary sense of the word—hunger for nourishment to sustain the life of the body, in opposition to the satiety of the fourth woe.<sup>8</sup> As in the first beatitude Luke speaks of a real poverty, Matthew of spiritual poverty. The justice hungered for is the justice of Christian works, of the moral law, which in Matthew's gospel characterizes Christianity.

Matthew's eighth beatitude (v 11) is interesting from several points of view. "For justice" appears again and with the same effect. The beatitude is a transition verse, one of Matthew's most characteristic literary preoccupations. Its second section, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven," is a repetition of the second section of the first beatitude—an example of *inclusio*, a device dear to semitic expression whereby the end returns to the starting point. In thought however this eighth beatitude serves as a transition to the ninth beatitude, probably the older of the two. Thus the first eight beatitudes are alike in their parallel structure and in the general nature of their thought. The ninth however is addressed directly to the apostles and does not have the same poetic structure.

We will now consider the four beatitudes found only in Matthew. The first, "Blessed are the meek (*prais*), for they shall inherit the earth," can be taken separately because of its distinctive meaning and the valuable insight it gives us into the primitive meaning of the beatitudes.

The phrase about the meek inheriting the earth comes from the psalms. In Ps 36(37):10-11 we read that yet in a little while

and the wicked will be no more, "but the meek (praeis) shall possess the land." In the Hebrew text the promise is addressed to the anawim, the "poor of the Lord," intimating that the first beatitude is also addressed to the "poor" (ptochoi). In the Greek text different words are used but in each instance they refer to the same Hebrew original. Like several other gospel texts speaking of the "poor" (Lk 4:18; 7:22; Mt 11:5) these beatitudes were based on the messianic prophecy of Isaiah, wherein the Lord's "chosen one" exclaims:

The Spirit of Yahweh is upon me,  
because Yahweh has anointed me,  
to bring good news to the anawim.

61:1

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus went into the synagogue at Nazareth and, having been invited to read the sacred text, read this passage from the prophet Isaiah. After he had rolled up the scroll and handed it back to the attendant he sat down. With the eyes of everyone in the synagogue fixed upon him he declared: "Today this scripture passage you have just heard has been fulfilled" (Lk 4:21).

There is reason to believe that Is 61 was written by II Isaiah and that the passage was understood as a servant poem during the time of Jesus. Thus scripture's most basic themes converged in the beatitudes, the prologue to the sermon on the mount, which is the charter of the kingdom of God. In view of its Old Testament semitic background the second beatitude was only a repetition of the first. Like other phrases found only in Matthew (in spirit, for justice), the beatitude of the meek seems to have been Matthew's addition. It was another way of producing the

effect achieved by adding "in spirit" to "poor" in the first beatitude, thereby promulgating the moral sense of poverty the redactor had in mind, and displaying the catechetical tendency of the first gospel.

In addition to the beatitude of the meek Matthew alone has the beatitudes of the merciful, the pure of heart and the peace-makers. While it would have been altogether unlike Luke to omit these beatitudes from his source, it would have been very like Matthew to add them.

Luke's beatitudes reveal that he has in mind those persons who actually experienced want, hunger, sorrow, and to them he promised a reward. While he understood that certain moral qualities must accompany these states, Luke nonetheless did not emphasize the moral note. "It is by way of contrast with the sufferings of the unfortunate not in recompense for their virtues, that Jesus speaks of the happiness that awaits them."<sup>9</sup>

Matthew's additions form a whole and contrast uniformly with Luke's version. The four beatitudes proper to Matthew have an active character and are more in conformity with our habitual way of thinking. These beatitudes praise virtues prized by all: meakness, mercy, purity of heart, spirit of peace; the other four constitute a reversal of the values of this world. The beatitudes proper to Matthew have a moral bearing; they speak of virtues to be practiced and set forth the kingdom as a recompense. The blessed are the just, while in the primitive beatitudes (and here Luke is closer to the primitive meaning) it is a question of men in a state of misery and suffering.

Comparison of the two versions of the beatitudes has juxtaposed not only the thought but also the writing methods of the two

evangelists. Matthew definitely expanded his source much more freely than did Luke, although the four beatitudes of Luke reflect more precisely the common source of the two gospels. Yet Luke also retouched his source, much more subtly to be sure, but some of these small changes produced surprising effects.

Luke made a serious effort to write good Greek and a number of his changes were purely stylistic. One slight but meaningful change was not, however. In his second and third beatitudes and also in the corresponding woes Luke added the word now. "Blessed are you who hunger now, that weep now." Since Luke's beatitudes referred quite directly to persons in an actual condition of hunger and misery, the addition of the word now highlighted the contrast between the passing nature of the present unhappiness and the reward, the blessedness to come.

Perhaps the most notable difference between the two versions of the beatitudes is direct and indirect address. Both evangelists have the last beatitude in the second person plural. Luke also used the second person plural in his other three beatitudes, so that Jesus addressed his hearers directly throughout. In Matthew, on the other hand, the third person is in all but the ninth beatitude.

Again the question arises: which evangelist changed the common source? Some circumstances imply that Matthew did the changing from the second to the third person. For example, since the second person appears in Matthew's last beatitude it can be argued that this was a reversion to the original form. And it has been shown that such abrupt changes at the end of a series of pronouncements were not uncommon. In any case, this

ninth beatitude was of a quite different character than the others.

There was also a tendency in primitive Christian preaching to broaden the scope of pronouncements and to give them a more exhortatory force. Therefore, beatitudes in the second person would have been addressed solely to Jesus' hearers, who fulfilled the conditions of the beatitudes simply by their present circumstances. But spoken in the third person, the beatitudes promised reward only to those who would realize certain moral conditions.

It has also been argued that in using the second person Luke was simply making an edifying application of a general saying preserved in Matthew in its original form. This argument is strengthened by Luke's use of the second person in a number of passages. Whereas Mark wrote: "Why does he eat with publicans and sinners?" (2:16), Luke has: "Why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners" (5:30). Whereas Matthew has: "John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He is possessed'" (11:18), Luke has: "John the Baptist has come neither eating bread nor drinking wine and you say, 'He is possessed'" (7:33).

Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of the priority of Matthew's version in its use of the third person is that elsewhere in scripture beatitudes appear in the third person almost without exception. On the other hand, woes appear in the second person more often than not.

As for the maledictions (Lk 6:24-26), everything seems to point to an addition on Luke's part. We have noted that it was characteristic of Matthew to combine and integrate sources to produce longer discourses that related orderly and relatively

complete accounts of Jesus' teachings on particular subjects. Thus Matthew's sermon on the mount is considerably longer than Luke's since Matthew introduced into his sermon material that Luke introduced into the middle of his gospel (cc 9-18). Luke in general followed the ordering of material that is found in the earlier gospel of Mark.

Significantly this ordering was interrupted twice: for a "small intercalation" (Lk 6:20-8:3), and for a "large intercalation" (9:51-18:14). But it is interesting to note that Luke did not mix the material he drew from different sources. He preferred instead to insert material in sizable blocks into his gospel's basic structure.

Having found in their common source a version of the beatitudes susceptible of different interpretations, both Matthew and Luke interpreted in a manner they thought apropos at the time: Matthew giving a moral interpretation, Luke a social interpretation. Matthew added phrases within individual beatitudes and also added other beatitudes according to the model furnished by the interpreted beatitudes. Luke made only subtle changes in his source, and to underscore his own interpretation of the beatitudes he drew up the malediction passage and set it up as a whole immediately following the beatitudes.

In fashioning the malediction passage Luke may have made use of gospel traditions at hand. But even if this had been the case he must have revised his source extensively. The woes bear the deep imprint of his style and are so perfect a counterpart of the beatitudes that no effort must have been spared.

Luke's intention to add the maledictions seems to have been the determining factor in his inversion of the incidents before the beatitudes (Galilean activity, institution of the twelve). The male-

dictions called for direct address—second person, usually plural—a direct approach very much in accord with Luke's style. And to give the antithetic development (beatitudes-maledictions) greater unity, Luke also put the beatitudes in the second person, even though the literary form has a strong preference for the third person.

But put in direct address the maledictions were evidently meant for an audience other than the apostles. Matthew's ordering of events before the beatitudes (Galilean activity, institution of the twelve) points to the apostles as the original audience of the beatitudes, while in the third person they seem destined for wider application.

Luke first described the institution of the twelve on the mountain: "He went out to the mountain to pray. . . . He called his disciples to him, and from among them he chose twelve" (6:12-13). Then he summarized Jesus' activity on the plain: "He came down the hill with them and took his stand on a level stretch. There was a large group of his disciples and a great multitude of people" (6:17). And finally, in order that the beatitudes be directed to the proper portion of this large audience, Luke interjected the transitional phrase: "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: 'Blessed are you poor'" (v 20).

This thread of direct address was broken, of course, by the maledictions addressed directly to a more specific portion of the large audience. At the end of the maledictions Luke interjected another, somewhat labored transitional phrase to bring the attention back to the group of the disciples: "But I say to you who are listening" (v 27).

By adding the maledictions Luke achieved his purpose with



notable success. The maledictions made explicit the manner in which Luke intended the beatitudes to be understood in his gospel. The antithesis—"Blessed are you poor . . . woe to you, the rich"—makes it clear that Luke had actual misery and want in mind. Matthew's "poor in spirit," by the practice of moral virtue, were in no way the counterparts of the objects of Luke's maledictions: "the rich, those filled now, those who laugh."

Disregarding, then, those elements that were added by the evangelists, Dupont concludes that there were probably four terse beatitudes in the Greek document which served as the common source for Luke and Matthew.

- a Blessed are the poor,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- b Blessed are they who mourn,  
for they shall be comforted.
- c Blessed are they who hunger,  
for they shall be satisfied.
- d Blessed shall you be when men insult you and persecute you, and  
utter all kinds of evil against you on my account. Rejoice and be  
glad, for your reward is great in heaven: in the same way men  
persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In general Matthew's text reproduces the source text more exactly, makes its meaning more explicit and broadens its spiritual and moral direction by inserting various additions. However, Luke's redaction is quite unfettered by the vocabulary of the source and contains several stylistic changes. On the other hand Luke made no important additions to his source, and added the maledictions only after he was finished with his source.

## Beatitudes: Eschatological Original

OUR literary study of the beatitudes allowed us to delineate what we may rightly regard as the four primitive beatitudes. Thereby we have arrived from the third level of meaning, the intentions of the evangelists, to the second level, apostolic tradition. But in the case of the beatitudes the apostolic tradition does not seem to differ notably from its primitive form in presenting the teachings of Jesus and the climate of his public ministry.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a thorough consideration of the doctrinal meaning of these primitive beatitudes should tell us a great deal about Jesus' own preaching and message.

As with Luke's four beatitudes, the four primitive beatitudes are of two kinds. On a whole the first three are all very concise and are devoted in a general way to the unfortunate, the disinherited of this world. The last beatitude is of a quite different nature. It appears in a more developed prose form and speaks of persecutions that Christ's followers will have to undergo in the practice of their faith.

The marked differences between the two types of beatitudes suggest that they were pronounced at different times and under different circumstances. If so, Matthew's and Luke's common source was already a compilation itself.<sup>2</sup>

The light shed by the last beatitude on the original meaning of

the beatitudes is particularly revealing, for this promise of blessedness to the persecuted was at the same time a prediction of persecutions to come. Persecution was the pledge of future reward.

A number of other gospel texts contain the same message, either by condemning Jewish persecutors or by consoling persecuted Christians. What the last beatitude formulates as a promise of persecution, a passage in Matthew expresses as a malediction of Jesus on the scribes and pharisees.

Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! You build up the tombs of the prophets and embellish the monuments of the just, saying: "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Very well, then, go on and fill up the measure of your fathers.

Serpents! Brood of vipers! How are you to escape being sentenced to hell? This is why I send you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some of these you will kill and crucify; others you will scourge in your synagogue and hound from city to city. And so, on you will fall all the blood of the just shed on earth, from the blood of Abel the just to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah.

Mt 23:29-35

This passage and the last beatitude are obviously similar, but the former does contain an additional element. In the beatitude there is but a simple comparison between the persecution of the prophets and the persecution of Christians, while the longer passage makes it clear that the Jewish persecution of Christians was not merely a parallel to the persecution of the prophets. This last persecution was unique; it was a culmination that would

unleash on its victims the punishment due all the crimes of the past.

Paul expressed the same thought in his letter to his converts at Thessalonica when he gave thanks not only because they welcomed the word of God when he preached it to them, but also because they had been found worthy to suffer persecution at the hands of the Jews, "who killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted us . . . so that all this time they have been filling up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last" (1 Thes 2:15-16).

This persecution by the Jews was unlike any other because it happened in a new context, in a new age. The time of preparation was past and the time of realization had begun. After many saving acts to prepare the way the Lord had set about accomplishing his saving will. The kingdom of God had arrived.

This new age had already been foretold by Jesus' precursor, who had begun his preaching with the proclamation: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2). The evangelists saw in John the Baptist's preaching the ultimate realization of the message of comfort and salvation that stands at the head of II Isaiah, the book of consolation. "This is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths'" (v 3).

John the Baptist also warned that this critical juncture of the old and new ages was a time of crisis and judgment. "When he saw many of the pharisees and sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them: 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the impending Wrath? . . . Already the ax is laid to the root of the

trees; every tree therefore that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' " (Mt 3:7, 10). The impending wrath was that day of the Lord which would open the eschatological, messianic age.

With the coming of the Lord an event of critical importance had taken place—the end time had come and the kingdom of God was present in the world. The climax also began an anticipated existence among the little group of Jesus' disciples, thus explaining the unprecedented hostility of the Jews.

Stressing the positive in the beatitude of the persecuted, Jesus affirmed that the suffering of the faithful had special value in meriting heaven by reason of context. But if the messianic age had begun the messiah need also be present. Throughout his public ministry, however, Jesus avoided laying formal public claim to the title because of the political aspirations associated with it. Yet in this beatitude of the persecuted and on many other occasions he *de facto* revealed himself to be the messiah when he could do so without provoking an outburst of nationalism.

As John the Baptist had declared, the advent of the Kingdom heralded a judgment. Men were to be judged on their position toward Christ. The faithful were to be blessed because they had suffered persecution "on my account." Luke was even more explicit in his "on account of the son of man," a term Jesus preferred to use in defining his mission. Its use in this context was especially apropos since the son of man would come to judge from his exaltation at the right hand of the Father.

Clarifying the beatitude of the persecuted by the addition of the negative malediction of the persecutors, Luke underlined the messianic import of the sayings. The reward and punishment

involved followed from the imminence that gave the persecution its special meaning. This persecution was directed against the messiah at the time he was announcing the kingdom. If one was blessed for suffering for Jesus it was because Jesus was the Christ and the son of man who would pronounce the last judgment. Persecution suffered for his sake constituted one of the signs of the end time.

Luke's first three beatitudes concern those who are poor, those who mourn, those who hunger. They all designated the same general category of the unfortunate, whom Jesus paradoxically declared to be blessed.

Like the fourth beatitude these three promised blessedness to the afflicted, but what is unique is that this blessedness did not follow from a persecution undergone for Christ. Rather it was attached to the unfortunate condition of a whole category of individuals, apparently abstracting from any special relationship the unfortunate might have had with the person of Jesus. We say apparently because closer examination reveals that these beatitudes were essentially christological. The blessedness they promised was one that only the messiah could bring them. By proclaiming the unfortunate blessed Jesus presents himself as the messiah.<sup>3</sup>

The "poor of the Lord," the *anawim*, have been given considerable attention in recent years, and deservedly so, for they constituted a class at once social and religious. "The *anaw*," writes Gelin, "is the little man, the humble, the oppressed, the poor. But his sufferings have brought him close to God, and as in point of fact the religious class was above all composed of little men, the words 'poor-pious-humble' on the one hand and

'rich-sinful-proud' on the other were gradually linked (Eccl 8:26-7; Wis 2:10). Thus the word *anaw* took on increasingly the technical meaning of 'pious'. The *anawim* were the followers of Jahweh."<sup>4</sup>

In mosaic legislation the term poor (*aniyyim*) designated those who did not own land (Ex 22:25; Lv 19:10). Naturally they were usually poor in the material sense and, as such, were often the object of the prophets' solicitude. In postexilic times the concepts poverty and trust in the Lord merged; the words poor and pious became almost synonymous. There was practically no distinction between the *aniyyim* (usually *ptochoi* in Greek, as in the first beatitude) and *anawim* (usually *praeis*, as in Matthew's second beatitude).

The meekness in question here does not correspond entirely to the contemporary idea of meekness. The meek (etymologically, "they who bend down") were those incapable of defending themselves, of securing justice for themselves; they put up with everything without any resistance. But again an ordinary semitic term took on a religious meaning. The meek were the humble who bowed not only before men but also before God and his will, however difficult it may have been. They knew that they were only servants, but for this very reason they put all their hope in the Lord and his mercy. Psalm 37 (36), from which the beatitude of the meek was drawn, developed the antithesis between the proud rich and powerful and the humble poor.

Yet a little while, and no more wicked!  
 you will mark his place, and he will be gone;  
 but the meek (*anawim*) shall possess the land. . . .  
 The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows

to bring down the poor (ani) and the needy,  
to slay those who walk uprightly.

v 10-11, 14.

Regard for poverty took almost exaggerated proportions among the essenes of the Dead Sea community. They regarded themselves as the elect remnant of Israel which would emerge in the last days from the purging judgment of God. In their eyes anyone who did not belong to the community and therefore to the remnant was no longer one of the chosen people of Israel.

Here too poverty was not only a social condition but also a religious concept. "According to the theology of the community, unchastity and desire for worldly riches are *the* sins, and are the sins which are the cause of all other sins. Through money, Belial, the devil, gains possession of man; the rich man who gathers wealth and is concerned about his goods thereby opens the door of his soul to the devil. The saying, 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Lk 16:13; Mt 6:24), might well have appeared in every one of the Dead Sea texts, for mammon is the instrument and weapon of the devil."<sup>5</sup>

The poverty of the essenes and above all their readiness to accept poverty was regarded as a state of grace whereby they could identify themselves with the elect. The sect was not a proletarian movement that merely promised a heavenly compensation to those who did not prosper on this earth. Poverty had to be accepted and embraced even though, as was the case with tertiary members, total surrender of property was not possible. Because of their readiness to accept poverty, the essenes called themselves "the poor in spirit," those who are poor by their own consent.



## KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

From the beatitude of the poor and meek it is but a step to the beatitudes of those who mourn and those who hunger. However the step was made in II Isaiah rather than in the psalms. A passage in Is 58 illustrates how closely the ideas were related.

Do you not know what fast pleases me?  
To break the chains of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke;  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke.  
To share your bread with the hungry,  
to give shelter to the homeless aniyim.

Is 58:6-7.

The blessed of the first three beatitudes, then, were characterized not only by their humble social condition but more especially by their abandonment to the divine will and wholehearted trust in the Lord. But there was also that humble social condition. It would be a mistake, according to Dupont, to so spiritualize the idea of poverty and so base it on the virtue of piety that the rich would be equated with the poor.

In the course of history then the biblical concept of poverty took on a religious meaning. But to grasp this meaning we must first understand the natural or social meaning of poverty. The different Hebrew words for poor (*anawim*, *aniyyim*) designated different aspects of actual poverty and in biblical usage were never entirely separate from its social origin. When the word poor took on a religious sense it still retained the overtones of its original meaning.

In proclaiming the blessedness of the poor Jesus used the words whose meaning wavered between two poles. One word had a

social sense and signified those deprived of the goods of this world; the other had a religious sense and designated the moral dispositions of humble submission and unreserved trust in God.

Colloquial use of the word poor was never restricted to either of these two meanings to the exclusion of the other. But the question arises: which of these two aspects of poverty did Jesus have in mind when he proclaimed the blessedness of poverty? Was this a beatitude of the poor in the social sense of the word, or did poor merely designate the pious and the virtuous in general?

To determine the answer we must first compare the poor of the beatitude to the two other kinds of people declared blessed in the gospel: children and sinners.

In Mark we read that "they were bringing children to Jesus, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them for it. But when Jesus saw this he was indignant, and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such as these belongs the kingdom of God ("kingdom of heaven" in Mt 19:14). Amen I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mk 10:13-15).

The phrase "to such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven" is similar to the first beatitude, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Were the "such as these" children in general or did the phrase represent a spiritualization of the idea of childhood—men who become like children? Verse 15 of Mark certainly favors the latter interpretation, that Jesus' declaration was an explicit exhortation to become like children in order to enter the kingdom.

Interestingly enough the parallel passage in Matthew does not

have this verse, although the saying is recorded in a different context (18:3). There is reason to believe therefore that Jesus was referring only to children in the physical sense. Here again is an example of Jesus' thought and intentions being transmitted through the intentions of apostolic tradition.

According to Mark the phrase was a demand for moral dispositions; the kingdom belonged not precisely to children but to those who were like children. Mark did not indicate what this resemblance consisted of, but Matthew did. Matthew used the phrase in the context of an admonition to the disciples during one of their quarrels about rank: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Amen, I say to you, unless you turn 'round and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself till he is like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'" (Mt 18:1-5).

Here there was no mistaking that one must learn to resemble a child in order to enter the kingdom. Matthew saw in the phrase a lesson in humility.

To grasp the full force of Matthew's use of the phrase it is also necessary to know that the Jewish attitude toward children at that time differed somewhat from the one prevalent today. Now there is a tendency to idealize childhood as the happy age of innocence, insouciance and simple faith. An entirely different attitude prevailed among the Jews during the time of Jesus. The child was considered of no importance, meriting of no attention or favors.

For Matthew's purpose it was not at all necessary that the

child be regarded as a model of humility; it was enough that he be regarded with scorn. For the disciples humility meant that they should make themselves of as little account as children before men, and willingly be regarded as unimportant. It was on this condition that they were to be allowed to enter the kingdom and be counted as great.

In Mark however the question is not one of "humbling oneself till one is like a child" in order to enter the kingdom, but of "accepting the kingdom like a child" in order to be admitted. Yet in a more subtle way Mark also turned the saying into a moral exhortation. The context in which Mark placed the phrase made it a lesson from Jesus to the apostles who, by repulsing children, showed that they shared the prevalent attitude toward children.

Jesus accorded these scorned creatures the privilege of his kingdom and presented them as models to his disciples, who had to accept the kingdom as children would. The dispositions of children formed no part of the consideration here, only those of the adults. These adult dispositions were the opposite of those shown by the apostles, who rejected the children without consideration.

In the gospel of Mark then the phrase takes on the same meaning as in Matthew—a lesson in humility. If children were privileged it was not because they had merited it, but simply because God took pleasure in those little ones whom adults despised. The mercy of Jesus flowed to them wholly and entirely from unmerited grace and divine predilection.

The children's privilege appears in another important passage recorded identically by Matthew (11:25) and Luke (10:21).

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the wise and knowing and revealing them to babes (napioi). Yes, Father, for such was your good pleasure (eudokia)."

The object of this revelation is not expressed but parallel passages indicate a christological meaning. Thus the Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ (Mt 16:16) and the babes (napioi) proclaimed Jesus as the son of David in Jerusalem (Mt 21:16). Paul developed the same idea in his first letter to the Corinthians (1:18-31).

The napioi were in the same state as the children (paidia)—God's blessing fell upon them because they were negligible creatures, not because of their good qualities. They may have been as aware of their worthlessness as the wise are aware of their wisdom, but this was not the reason why revelations were given them. Jesus expressly attributed this to the Father's will or good pleasure (eudokia), a circumstance Paul also emphasized (1:28). But again the preference was entirely gratuitous. The little ones may have been worthy to receive God's gift, but the gift was pure liberality, flowing entirely from the divine eudokia.

The beatitude of the little ones, therefore, was an excellent commentary on the beatitude of the poor. In the Jewish mentality childhood and poverty were often regarded with scorn and disdain. When Jesus proposed a child to his disciples as a model it was not because they should imitate one or another of the virtues of childhood, but that day might have the humility to be counted for no more than as children. Thus, the lesson of the beatitude of the children was theological rather than moral.

The privilege of children did not change its nature when it was extended to men who by humility became like children. Even if the privilege of the humble should reward their virtue, it was not granted them under this aspect. So too was the case with the beatitude of the poor. Jesus was not interested principally in the merit of the poor, even though their blessedness rewarded their virtue. Here also the teaching was theological rather than moral. God's preference was directed to the humanly underprivileged, and he was pleased to give those whom the world considered the most unfortunate a privileged status in his kingdom.

The light thrown on the beatitude of the poor by the privilege of children is reinforced in a striking, truly paradoxical way by the sinners' privilege. The most interesting passage of this kind concerns the time when Jesus sat at table in Levi's house. The scribes and pharisees had asked why he ate with tax collectors and sinners. "Jesus, who had heard, said to them, 'It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the just, but sinners'" (Mk 2:17).

There is no question here that the sinners were not really sinners. They most assuredly were sinners and as such had done nothing to merit salvation; nor had they been made worthy of salvation by accepting it as a grace. Yet Jesus declared that his messianic mission was directed to them because they acknowledged that they were sinners before God and opened themselves to the salvation that was offered them. The just on the other hand put their trust in what they merited by their own efforts and closed their hearts to the message of salvation.

The salvation that Jesus promised was purely gratuitous, intended especially for those who had no title to it, for those

who, conscious of their unworthiness, knew that they could rely only on God's mercy. The just imagined that they earned a right to salvation and, refusing to give up this right, rejected a gratuitous and merciful salvation which they regarded as unsuitable for themselves.

Elsewhere Jesus declared: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). He went in search of the lost sheep, for it was his mission to find the lost drachma, to welcome home the prodigal son.

Taken literally this statement could have indicated that Jesus was reserving the kingdom for sinners. But as always his declarations must be understood in the light of the gospel as a whole and in view of the semitic love of the emphatic statement, and even hypobole. In his teachings Jesus made it clear that salvation was a task as well as a gift.

Among sinners Jesus found humility, repentance and docility, while among the just he found only pride. Preference for sinners and the lost was not purely arbitrary, for among them he found an open-heartedness that was lacking among the just.

The privileged condition of children and sinners delineates the primitive meaning of the beatitude of the poor. In Matthew's version of this beatitude the kingdom of heaven is clearly promised as a recompense for virtuous action, in this case the practice of poverty. But when compared with the privilege of children and sinners, the original theological meaning of the beatitude of the poor is even clearer. If the poor were privileged from the point of view of access to the kingdom this was because Jesus had directed his mission especially to them. They were promised salvation because they were conscious of their

lack of merit and were ready to open themselves to divine mercy. The fundamental lesson of the beatitude of the poor is basically the absolute gratuity of divine election.

In his *Jesus* Martin Dibelius writes that "it belongs to the very nature of faith that it turns to God with its sins and its need and accepts both forgiveness and help, without asking any question about its deserts or lack of them, without making comparisons or calculations."<sup>6</sup> The Jews during the time of Jesus were inclined to make the observance of the mosaic law, written or oral, the sole criterion of religion. Therefore Jesus found it necessary to affirm that a man did not justify himself in God's sight by such observance alone. Even if a man succeeded in doing everything that the law commanded he remained an unprofitable servant in God's sight.

"Suppose one of you has a servant who is plowing or tending sheep, and he comes in from the fields. Will the master say to him: 'Come at once and sit down at table?' Will he not rather say to him: 'Get my supper ready, then clean up, and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you can eat and drink?' Must he feel grateful to this servant for carrying out his orders? So with you: when you have carried out all your orders, you should say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have merely done our duty'" (Lk 17:7-10).

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard made it clear that while God was just to all he bestowed his bounty where he chose. "Have I not a right to do what I like with what belongs to me?" (Mt 20:15). And if God has compassion precisely upon the seemingly lost, as a father has for his wayward child, so he



who regards himself as "less" lost must not remonstrate with him (Lk 15:11-32). Therefore the right attitude before God and in view of the coming kingdom was that of the child who understood the art of receiving presents given him. For what Jesus meant when he assigned the kingdom to the childlike (Mk 10:14f) was not the innocence of the child—an impossible demand—but that simplicity which surrenders itself without reservation.

A study of what was promised in the four primitive beatitudes (kingdom of heaven, comfort, food, reward in heaven) indicates that each had a basic eschatological, christological character. Even in the Old Testament, especially in the psalms, the happiness promised in the beatitudes evidenced an eschatological nuance. The happiness that could not be promised to the persecuted in the present world would be enjoyed in the world to come.

In the New Testament the beatitudes promised a happiness that shared in the messianic salvation, in the kingdom of God. Thus were the beatitudes of the poor and hungry clarified by Luke: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (14:15). But the beatitudes were much more than a simple promise of compensation that any preacher could have made. In Jesus the beatitudes had a unique author, for in proclaiming them he announced the opening of the happy era when the hungry would be filled and the afflicted consoled. This messianic happiness Jesus promised to the poor, the afflicted and the hungry, he himself would bring on by inaugurating the kingdom. The beatitudes were more than pious consolations leading men to hope for a better fate in another world. They were the proclamation that a new world was about to begin.

In Luke and in Matthew the beatitudes were transformed so as to set forth requirements for the Christian life. Adding his four extra beatitudes Matthew especially turned Jesus' call to the poor and hungry into a catalogue of Christian virtues. And, with the same apostolic intention, the other sayings of the sermon on the mount were put together to form a kind of catechism dealing with the life of the Christian in the world.

This text was what the Christians wanted and needed to know and what the Church and the evangelists had been divinely commissioned to tell them. The Church and the evangelists naturally began with the teachings of Jesus, even though, by the very force of circumstances, his teaching was largely messianic and eschatological.

"How could it have been otherwise in a preaching that sought to prepare men for the Kingdom! How could one expect anything else from a proclaimer who stands before his hearers as a visible sign of the coming reign of God! All his commandments and requirements are part of his message of the Kingdom of God, rather than appropriate measures for the reform of this present world; in all of them, in the most intelligible as in the strangest of them, the coming of the Kingdom is either tacitly or explicitly taken for granted as the major presupposition."<sup>7</sup>

## Parables: Literary Form and Reinterpretation

MUCH has been said about getting back to the simplicity of the gospels. But the gospels can be regarded as simple only if one fails to note or chooses to ignore the many evidences of gradual formation, multiple authorship and different levels of meaning contained in them, such as the intentions of Jesus, those of apostolic tradition and those of the evangelists.

Studies such as Dupont's exposition of the beatitudes reveal the incomparable, fascinating depths of the gospels. And yet the gospels are not the exclusive domain of the scholars, for the gospels speak to the hearts of all Christians—the experience of the ages has proved this. But it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that the unschooled reader needs guidance. Again we are reminded that the Church created the gospels and not vice versa, and that the gospels read in and with the Church is the only sure way to comprehend them.

Even the expert is soon made aware of his limitations and the inconclusiveness of his conclusions. He experiences the need of a source and authority greater than his own. One of the points Jean Levie S.J. makes in his *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men* is that "a very wide margin may exist between 'Scriptural statement' interpreted historically and philologically by the individual exegete, and the same assertion as understood

and sanctioned dogmatically by the Church."<sup>1</sup> And in the same connection he observes: "Since I have been teaching New Testament exegesis I have often been struck by the theological limits to the part played by the individual exegete apart from the judgment of the Church. We may rightly be astonished at the confidence and speed with which certain exegetes or theologians of earlier times used to pick out this or that theological truth as formally taught by the inspired writer."<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of other gospel passages that can teach us as much as the beatitudes, especially the parables. As Dodd has written: "The parables are perhaps the most characteristic element in the teaching of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospels. . . . Certainly there is no part of the gospel record which has for the reader a clearer ring of authenticity."<sup>3</sup>

As we pass from beatitudes to parables, we enter a broader and less controllable field. Confined as they were to a short passage the beatitudes served admirably as a pilot study. But the original meaning and the varieties of reinterpretation found in the parables is difficult to grasp because of the extent of the parable passages, and because of the extent of the reinterpretation found therein. Yet here again we shall find evidence of the same processes of gospel composition and the same three levels of meaning.

The parables have been the subject of a great deal of discussion in the last several decades. The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole*, meaning comparison. In the Septuagint this word was used to translate the Hebrew word *mashal*—a word that embraced "figurative forms of speech of every kind."<sup>4</sup> This is an important point, since much difficulty has arisen

over interpretation of the parables of the New Testament because many interpreters have preconceived ideas, narrow and rigid, of what a parable should be.

With truly Germanic thoroughness Joachim Jeremias has written that *mashal* "may mean in the common speech of post-biblical Judaism, without resorting to a formal classification, figurative forms of speech of every kind: parable, similitude, allegory, fable, proverb, oracular utterance, riddle, significant name, symbol, pseudonym, example (type), commonplace, argument, apology, refutation, just."<sup>5</sup> Moreover he finds that *parabole* in the New Testament can mean not only parable, but also comparison, symbol, proverb, riddle and rule.

It is not surprising then that there is little agreement among authors on the number of parables in the gospels. The number cited varies from twenty-seven to almost seventy or even a hundred.<sup>6</sup> The number depends on how a writer determines what constitutes a parable—whether he considers only developed comparisons or includes all passages which the gospels call parables or which bear some resemblance to parables.

Semitic thought has never submitted easily to definitions, the *forté* of the Greeks, and this was particularly true in regard to parables. For our purposes, it is sufficient to distinguish between the parable form, which was a "more or less developed exposition of some spiritual truth by means of a simile or likeness drawn from earthly things,"<sup>7</sup> and the parable proper, which was a consistent story.

Basically, the parable was a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or everyday life. A simple metaphor was elaborated into a picture by the addition of detail, or into a story, additional

details serving to develop a situation. The latter was a parable in the proper sense.<sup>8</sup>

The three levels of meaning are apparent in the parables just as they are in the beatitudes. In more radical days however scholars rejected everything that originated with the Church as a perversion. To facilitate the distinction between words of Jesus and apostolic interpretation they established rigid definitions of parable and rejected as spurious everything in the gospels that did not conform to their rules.

Thus some scholars insisted that everything in a parable must be perfectly true to nature and life. But in view of the semitic love of the emphatic statement—not to mention Jesus' well authenticated use of hyperbole—it is now recognized that such a rule was too rigid. In many instances, parabolic terms were deliberately out of proportion precisely in order to emphasize a point.

Other a priori rules have also been found to have only limited application. For a time some scholars sought to follow a rule that parables had to be simple. J. J. Vincent of Manchester points out that "Joachim Jeremias inherits from the liberals the common belief that Jesus was a comparatively simple teacher, could we only strip off later accretions and 'get back to' His essential message. From the beginning of the Church there was 'an unconscious desire to discover a deeper meaning in the simple words of Jesus.' Why this is supposed to have been the case is never quite clear. That they should have been puzzled by many of the words—as we are—was to be expected. But that they should deliberately make what was already perplexing enough

a matter more difficult is hard to believe.”<sup>9</sup> Thus interpreted, the parables more often than not were reduced to the level of banal moralism wholly unrelated to kerygma.

Most popular however was the presumption that a parable expressed a single point, that it could not be an allegory. Perhaps it is safe to say that the typical parable story did have a single point; it became an allegory when each detail in the story was a separate metaphor with a significance of its own, or when a correspondence was suggested between particular points in the simile and its application.

Allegory was the *bête noire* during the “get back to the primitive gospel” period. All allegory was looked upon as apostolic interpretation, as a perversion of the primitive meaning that should be stripped and discarded. While it is almost certain that some of the allegorical interpretation found in the gospel parables did come from the level of apostolic tradition, it is fundamental to our understanding of the gospels to note that such interpretation was entirely legitimate. And, quite apart from any other consideration, this interpretation was in the inspired text.

Scholars now admit that parable and allegory were closely related and there is no reason for presuming that Jesus could not have used allegory in his parables. “Some kind of allegory is scarcely avoidable in any kind of comparison. A parable depends upon some likeness apparent, implied or pointed out between two things. Within the rabbinical tradition, what Dibelius calls ‘half-allegorical forms’ are found repeatedly, such as the representation of God by a king, the people by a vineyard, the world by a field, the last judgment by a harvest, the beginning of the messianic era by a marriage. Whenever these words

were used, the necessary identification was made in the mind automatically."<sup>10</sup>

The parables were modified in much the same way as the beatitudes, and the evangelists were not too concerned about any dissonance that may have been created by this modification. And like the beatitudes many of the parables were originally messianic and eschatological.

During the liberal period of interpretation, when the gospels were being stripped of their supernatural elements, the eschatological message itself was regarded as an accretion and was discarded. This approach especially reduced the parables to the level of banal moralism.

Gradually this trend was reversed and scholars recognized that an eschatological teaching was part of Jesus' message, that in fact it constituted the whole burden of his teaching and mission. "The kingdom of God is here" was an imminent reality for the early Christians. It is the great merit of Dodd's book on the parables that it stresses this element of realized eschatology, even to the detriment of the future aspects of the kingdom.

Moule has admirably summarized the results which have emerged from the critical study of the parables. On the one hand criticism has "established beyond reasonable doubt that, by the time the gospels were written, the parables as originally told by Jesus had undergone considerable alteration in the process of telling and retelling. . . . Yet, although an irresistibly strong case has been made for the existence of moulding and adapting processes in the transmission of the parables, the extent of it in any given instance always needs careful testing, and current



criticism sometimes tends to be over mechanical in its techniques."<sup>11</sup> Specifically, criticism ceases to be scientific if it "jumps to the conclusion that no allegory can have been dominical,"<sup>12</sup> or supposes that any appearance of the idea of growth in the kingdom is an "accommodation to an ecclesiastical situation and to the delay of the parousia."<sup>13</sup>

Originally eschatological and messianic, the beatitudes were reinterpreted in a moral and ascetical sense, and there is reason to believe that many of the parables were likewise eschatological and messianic. But in addition to moral and ascetical reapplication there are a number of other reapplications in the parables. Notable is the number of parables reinterpreted in conformity with futurist eschatology, the expectation of the second coming of Jesus and the final consummation of all things. This type of reinterpretation cannot be understood apart from the complicated matter of the second coming expectation.

Eschatology, and especially the question of the second coming, has occupied the center of gospel study over the past century or more. During a period of rationalistic criticism all interpretation was first rejected as perversion and the gospels were stripped of their supernatural and eschatological elements. Then eschatology was restored with a vengeance. It was argued that the burden of Jesus' message was the proclamation of a kingdom that was never realized (Schweitzer's thoroughgoing eschatology).

The reaction to this argument was a contention that Jesus proclaimed a kingdom that was completely realized, in the historical sense, during his own lifetime and ministry (Dodd's

realized eschatology). Neither system found a place in Jesus' preaching for the time of the Church, an interval between resurrection and exaltation on the one hand, and the second coming on the other. Further, neither system has ever found the second coming in Jesus' teaching.

Since the belief in the second coming is clearly affirmed in the epistles and gospels, and especially in the parables, there remains a large gap between the preaching of Jesus and the kerygma. The extent and significance of this gap is a much discussed question today, although no one is likely to deny that an understanding of the gospels and especially the parables is impossible unless reinterpretation—especially eschatological reinterpretation—is taken into consideration.

In his influential *Parables of the Kingdom* Dodd interprets the parables according to the realized eschatology that has become identified with his name. While others may question the amount of futurist reinterpretation he finds in the parables, and reject outright his view of the second coming, it would be unwise to study the parables without taking into consideration the principles he follows.

Dodd insists that both the original and subsequent "settings in life" must be taken into consideration. "The most recent school of Gospel criticism, that of *Formgeschichte*, or 'form criticism,' has taught us that in order to understand rightly any passage in the Gospels we must inquire into the 'setting in life' (*Sitz im Leben*) in which the tradition underlying that passage took form. The original 'setting in life' of any authentic saying of Jesus was of course provided by the actual conditions of His ministry. But the form-critics rightly call our attention

to the fact that the formed tradition of His teaching, as it reaches us, has often been affected by the changed conditions under which His followers lived during the period between His death and the completion of our Gospels. Its 'setting in life' is provided by the situation in the early Church."<sup>14</sup>

This same conclusion proves true for the parables just as it did in the case of the beatitudes—certain changes in the historical situation led to reapplication. In order to recover the original meaning and application of a parable, it is necessary to relate it to the original situation, so far as we can reconstruct it. In this we "may be guided by the following principles: (1) The clue must be found, not in ideas which developed only with the experience of the early Church, but in such ideas as may be supposed to have been in the minds of the hearers of Jesus during His ministry. Our best guide to such ideas will often be the Old Testament, with which they may be presumed to have been familiar. Thus the images of a vineyard, a fig-tree, harvest, a feast, and others, had associations which could escape no one brought up on the Old Testament. (2) The meaning which we attribute to the parable must be congruous with the interpretation of His own ministry offered by Jesus in explicit and unambiguous sayings, so far as such sayings are known to us; and in any case it must be such as to fit the general view of His teachings to which a study of the nonparabolic sayings leads."<sup>15</sup>

Summarizing his findings Dodd indicates two ways the Church reinterpreted Jesus' sayings: "(1) They would tend to give a general and permanent application to sayings originally directed towards an immediate and particular situation; and (2)

they would tend to give to sayings which were originally associated with the historical crisis of the past, an application to the expected crisis of the future."<sup>16</sup> The first of these motives he calls the homiletic or paraenetic, and the other the eschatological, and it is almost beyond question that these norms are applicable in the interpretation of the parables. But one would have to adopt entirely Dodd's position regarding the second coming and the "interim kingdom" to apply them as sweepingly as he does.

In particular Dodd's view of the kingdom in Jesus' preaching makes it necessary for him to remove all references to an "interim kingdom" between the resurrection and the second coming; that is, any saying indicating a period of growth. This view requires rather extensive surgery on the gospels.

It is interesting to note that Dodd too makes reference to the threefold level of meaning, e.g. in his study of the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-27). Matthew appended the parable to his apocalyptic discourse, which is focused on the imminent coming of the son of man. After the parable Matthew added other sayings to illustrate the unexpectedness of the advent: the saying about Noah's flood, the parable of the thief at night.

Luke provided an introduction that clearly indicated the application he intended: "He went on to tell them a parable, because he was now close to Jerusalem and they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately" (19:11). The apostle thus drew attention to that part of the story which tells how the master took a long journey and made the parable a lesson concerning the delay of the second advent.

Apart from these special applications both versions contain a moral which differed only slightly in the two versions: "To every one who has more will be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Lk 19:26). In the common source of the two versions the point of the parable is thought to have been "not in the reference to the second advent, or to its delay, but to the specific treatment of the worthy and unworthy servants."<sup>17</sup> The same maxim appears in Mk 4:25 as a detached saying, indicating that in the common source the parable was used to illustrate the maxim.

Finally, relating the story itself to the actual situation in the life of Jesus, Dodd concludes that the "wicked slave" was the type of pious Jew who suffered so much criticism in the gospels, the Jew who sought personal security in a meticulous observance of the law.

"If this argument is sound, we can trace in the history of this particular pericope of the Gospels three stages. First, the parable is told by Jesus, with pointed reference to the actual situation. Next the early Church makes use of the parable for paraenetic purposes, applying it as an illustration of the maxim, 'To him that hath shall be given.' It is at this stage that the form of the parable underlying Matthew and Luke was fixed in tradition. In the Matthaean line of tradition it suffered further 'paraenetic' developments. The amounts of money given to the three servants are now graded, in order that the parable may illustrate the varieties of human endowments. At a third stage of 'paraenetic' motive is superseded or supplemented by the 'eschatological' interest. The return of the master signifies the second advent of Christ."<sup>18</sup>

In his *Parables of Jesus* Jeremias elaborates on the homiletic and eschatological reinterpretation themes propounded by Dodd. "The parables have a twofold historical setting. First, the original historical setting, not only of the parables, but of all the sayings of Jesus, is their individual, concrete situation in the activity of Jesus. Then there is a second historical setting which is the situation of the primitive Church. We only know the parables in the form which they received from the primitive Church; hence we are faced with the task of recovering their original form in so far as that is possible for us."<sup>19</sup>

Jeremias then goes on to list a number of "laws of transformation" that we should be aware of. Among them are a tendency to elaborate; parables originally addressed to opponents or to the crowd transferred to the community; shift of emphasis to the exhortatory aspect, especially from the eschatological to the exhortatory; parables related to the Church's actual situation (gentile environment, delay of the parousia); formation of collections of parables; and new settings, especially generalizing conclusions that lend the parables a universal meaning. Without a doubt these laws can be used profitably within the limits of a sound eschatology.

## The Reason for Parables

THE great emphasis in the past on the "simple and single point" of parables arose from sincere attempts to recapture the original forms of the parables. It was sensed, however obscurely, that the original form of some parables had been modified to fit the catechetical and pastoral needs of the early Church, and that this modification sometimes took the form of allegorical elaboration.

The simplicity presumption especially, the insistence that a parable must clarify rather than mystify, was an excessive reaction to the New Testament's own explanation of the purpose of parables. This explanation was paradoxical enough to suit the strongest tastes. Parables were for teaching, a pedagogical device. "The purpose of parabolic teaching is clear; its aim is to elucidate truth, not to obscure it, still less to conceal an issue or to serve as a punishment."<sup>1</sup> Fundamentally, this aim seems unquestionable.

Yet the only reason given in the gospels for Jesus' use of the parables was, in effect, "to conceal the mystery of the kingdom of God." Here again is one of those dissonances that seem to reveal so much about the formation of the gospels and their unrivaled depth and riches.

The reason given in the gospels for parables is found in close conjunction with the parable of the sower and its explanation

(Mk 4; Mt 13). In the parable of the sower the disciples ask Jesus why he teaches in parables and he gives the reason; then Jesus explains the parable of the sower. Continued in Mark's gospel, the passage is followed by a group of saying (v 21-25), the parables of the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed, and a summary statement on the use of parables (v 33-34).

To understand the reason-for-the-parables passage (v 10-12) it is necessary to realize that the grouping of the material in this section (Mk 4:1-34) was an artificial one. Inconsistencies in the description of the situation, among other things, indicate that independent passages had been joined. At the beginning and end of the section Jesus is addressing the crowd and out of a boat, but in v 10-12 Jesus addresses the apostles in private.

The passage in question was apparently interpolated by Mark. In v 10 "those who were round him and the twelve" ask Jesus about the parables. The description of the audience is unusually detailed and two groups of hearers seem to have been brought together: the larger audience to whom the parable of the sower was addressed, and the smaller audience to whom the reason for the parables was given.

According to Jeremias the reason for the parable is contained in v 13 ("Do you not understand this parable? How then are you to understand any parable?") and in the interpretation that follows. Verse 11 begins with one of Mark's link phrases: "And he said to them." Finding a question about parables in his original source Mark used the opportunity to insert another of Jesus' sayings which included a reference to parables.

In view of what has been said above there is reason to believe that there were three stages in the growth of material in Mk 4:1-34. Significantly enough these three stages correspond to



the three levels of meaning previously discussed. First, three parables of Jesus (the sower, seed growing secretly, mustard seed) were brought together in the earliest stages of gospel formation. The interpretation by way of an answer to the question put by the smaller group definitely reflected the preoccupations of the primitive Church. Finally, taking advantage of the question "about the parables" in v 10, Mark introduced a second answer with his typical link phrase: "And he said to them."

"The three stages of the tradition (Jesus, the primitive Church, Mark) are recognizable throughout the whole of Mark's gospel, but nowhere so clearly as in Chapter 4."<sup>2</sup>

That the passage was a genuine saying of Jesus is not seriously questioned. The strong contrast (those outside, those to whom the mystery is given) and circumlocutions thrice used to indicate the divine activity ("has been given" instead of "God gives") are typically semitic and argue for the authenticity of the saying. Nonetheless, inserted where it is, the saying does give the impression that Jesus used parables to conceal the truth. Even sympathetic commentators have been inclined to agree that Mark blundered into the impression he created.

Finding the word parable in the question in v 10 Mark inserted another of Jesus' sayings containing the word. But in doing so, it is argued, Mark failed to consider the two rather different meanings of the broad term *marshal* used in the two passages. In v 10 *marshal* meant parable in the proper sense; in v 11-12 it meant riddle. Verse 10 was an observation on Jesus' teachings in parables; v 11-12 were observations on his teaching in general.

This author personally believes that Mark was fully aware of the difference and was pleased by the paradoxical effect created by bringing the two passages together. Matthew and Luke felt obliged to tone down the paradox but Mark's text with its great depth of meaning still challenges our comprehension.

Even accepting the first paradoxical impression, however, the passage is not inexplicable. For one thing, while it is undeniable that the aim of parabolic teaching was to elucidate truth and not obscure it, yet "we cannot assume that Jesus always sought to be immediately understood. The parables were used to provoke thought and encourage reflection."<sup>8</sup> The original application of parables was not always transparent and explanations must have been sought by the first hearers. Then too it was characteristic of Semitic thought to emphasize divine causality and ignore secondary causes. This produced a number of paradoxical statements in the Old Testament, such as the Lord's declaration to Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart, "so that he will not let the people go" (Ex 4:21).

Also characteristic of semitic thought was the expression of a result in the form of a command. One of the best examples of this mode of expression is found in the description of Isaiah's call to the prophetic office. Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying to him:

Go, and say to this people:  
"Hear and hear, but do not understand;  
see and see; but do not perceive."  
Make the heart of this people fat,  
and dull their ears,

#### KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

and shut their eyes;  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears,  
and understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed.

Is 6:9-10

There is reason to believe that in these words Isaiah described his call "from the standpoint of his actual experiences as a prophet."<sup>4</sup> Thus Moule thinks that the difficulty of this bridge passage has been exaggerated. It is quite gratuitous to assume that the categories of "those outside" and "those inside" are meant to be rigid and predestined. "We are being perversely literalistic if we imagine that the free quotation from Is 6 . . . is really intended to mean that parables are used in order to exclude. . . . It is most naturally taken as an arresting, hyperbolic, oriental way of saying 'Alas! many will be obdurate.'"<sup>5</sup> Considering the passage from the third level of meaning, the evangelist's, the observation seems well taken. Yet the passage remains enough of an anomaly that we are justified in looking for a fuller explanation in the process of composition.

Aware that the semitic expression of result as command created grave difficulties for nonsemitic minds, Matthew changed the "in order that" at the beginning of Mk 4:12 into a purpose clause: "in order that (as it is written)." But in the process he lost "something of the deep Hebraic sense that in some mysterious way the closing of the blind eyes and the hardening of the heart do not occur apart from the will of God. Matthew quotes Is 6:9f. almost verbatim from the Septuagint and turns the whole matter into a straight fulfillment of OT prophecy: 'Unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah . . .' (Mt 13:14)."<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of his fourth chapter Mark related that Jesus began to teach beside the sea. A very large crowd had gathered about him, so he got into a boat and from there taught the people "many things in parables" (v 2). After relating the parable of the sower Mark continued: "And when he was alone, those who were round him and the twelve questioned him about the parables. And he said to them: 'To you the mysterion of the kingdom of God has been given; but to those who are outside everything is in parables'" (v 10-11).

As has been noted, the passive was here a circumlocution to avoid mentioning God's name; the mysterion was God's gift. An antithesis was drawn between the disciples of Jesus ("to you") and those who were outside.

Fundamentally it would seem that Jesus affirmed here the same truth he affirmed in pronouncing the beatitudes. The kingdom had arrived and was to be given to the poor, the little ones. There is also the saying preserved in Luke: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (12:32). It is hard to escape the impression that the mysterion was the kingdom, since mysterion meant mystery or secret, and calling the kingdom a mysterion fit in admirably with the paradoxical effect Mark achieved by inserting his second answer to the apostles' question. But Matthew and Luke went even further along this way; in their versions they wrote: "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom."

One of those slightly ambiguous, richly evocative biblical terms, mysterion was in a sense a parable in itself. One or another of its many facets can give light to a myriad of contexts.

Like other Greek terms, such as *soma* (body), *mysterion* was taken over and adapted to biblical thought. In classical Greek it meant secret, and in the pagan mystery religions it designated a secret religious rite, open only to initiates, which was believed to impart salvation. From the time of Plato it also designated an obscure, secret doctrine.

The kingdom was not a secret or mystery in this sense, however. And the background of the term as used by Jesus was already in the Old Testament. But the term appeared only very late in the Old Testament, its use being restricted to the hellenistic period. The book of Daniel made use of it, according to the Septuagint, as did Wisdom and a few other late books.

Wisdom 6:22-23 traced the origin of wisdom to the revelation of mysteries—that is, divine secrets—from the beginning of creation. But far from being reserved to initiates, these mysteries or secrets were proclaimed abroad, that wisdom might be spread everywhere. In the book of Daniel (2:8, 27-30) God's hidden designs for the future, revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in dreams, were also called mysteries. "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be the latter days" (v 28).

Since the dreams were enigmatic and needed interpretation, they could in a sense be called mysteries. But as regards the contents of the revelation, those mysteries were ultimate events, intended by God from all eternity, to which he held the key and which his Spirit alone could reveal in advance. *Mysterion* referred therefore primarily to the revelation of God's redemptive plan.

In the New Testament the term is found almost exclusively in

Paul's epistles. It appears only once in the synoptic gospels—in the passage explaining the parables. Paul's idea of *mysterion* was evidently derived from the books of Daniel and Wisdom, and it is difficult to see how the term could have meant anything else in the synoptic passage.

Pauline *mysterion* was a divine secret that could be known only by revelation. The principal object of *mysterion* was the divine plan of salvation, which was realized by the death of Jesus on the Cross. Thus the *mysterion* could also be called the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4; Col 4:3), the mystery of God, the mystery of the secret wisdom of God, or the mystery of the will of God. Practically speaking *mysterion* and the gospel were one and the same. Conceived in God before the creation of the world, hidden in God from all eternity, the *mysterion* was revealed in pure grace by the Spirit of God. It was therefore a mystery of faith.<sup>7</sup>

"The term mystery designates in general the fulfillment and the revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Church of the grand redemptive plan of God, or its reference may be to particular dispensations of this plan."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the temporary hardening of Israel was a mystery (Rom 11:25), as were the glorious transformation of believers at the *parousia* ("Yes, listen! I am going to tell you a mystery: we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed"—1 Cor 15:51), and the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church ("This mystery contains great truth. I take it that it refers to Christ and the Church"—Eph 5:32).

"Mystery in the NT concerns the wisdom of the Father in accordance with which He decides, prepares, and executes His redemptive purposes, the aim of which is to 'unite all things in Christ' (Eph 19f), and in accordance with which He reveals

Himself by His Spirit to His elect and more particularly to His apostles and prophets who are its stewards.”<sup>9</sup>

In the beatitudes Jesus declared that “the kingdom of God is yours,” thus characterizing that kingdom as *the* mysterion: the Lord’s plan of salvation revealed, established, granted and accepted. Brought into existence by the Lord’s saving acts in history, the kingdom was an objective reality into which men entered freely by election and pure grace. It was not enough to know the kingdom in an abstract way; men also had to make a decision and commit themselves to it. “To know” in semitic thought was never a purely intellectual exercise, but implied a personal involvement. Therefore even Matthew’s and Luke’s versions, which speak of the disciples knowing the mysteries of the kingdom, are not far removed from the more realistic version found in Mark: “To you the mysterion of the kingdom of God has been given.”

In sharp contrast to the disciples given the mysterion were “those who are outside, for whom everything happens in parables” (v 11b). As we have seen, the Hebrew *mashal* which stands behind the term parable was a very inclusive term. The thread of thought (or lack of it) and its antithetic parallel seem to require that the word parable be understood here in some way other than as a strict parable, in a sense other than in the preceding verse. The parallelism requires that mysterion and parable correspond, and an antithesis is clearly called for. It would seem therefore that, despite superficial appearances, mysterion and parable in the *proper* sense are more synonymous than not. The mysterion was basically the revealed plan of salvation, while the purpose of a parable was to elucidate and not obscure truth.

But as we noted above *maschal* could mean many things. There seems to be great merit in Jeremias' contention that "parables" in v 11b meant riddle. "To happen in parables" is for him synonymous with "to be obscure" and he translates this verse: "But for those who are without all things are obscure."<sup>10</sup>

It was suggested above that the reason for the parables advanced in v 12 is not inexplicable even in view of its paradoxical qualities. Parables could at times be somewhat enigmatic in order to provoke thought and encourage reflection, and results were often expressed as commands.

But it should also be observed that the passage from Isaiah was quoted very freely in v 12. The quotation varied widely in both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint but, as T. W. Manson has pointed out, it showed a remarkable agreement with the paraphrase of Isaiah commonly used in the synagogue, "a version which later was incorporated in the written Targum."<sup>11</sup> If the quotation is approached in the light of this Aramaic paraphrase, some interesting possibilities present themselves.

The word translated "so that" at the beginning of v 12, so as to introduce a purpose clause, could also be translated "who," thereby introducing a relative clause. "So that" would thus amount to "that it might be fulfilled" and would be introducing a free quotation from Is 6:9-10. "The verse therefore reads: 'in order that (as it is written) they might see and yet not see, hear, and yet not understand.'"<sup>12</sup> The word at the beginning of 12b translated "lest" ("in order that not") could also be translated "unless," or "lest perhaps," although there is no need to press this point.

It is interesting to note that at least part of this approach to the



explanatory passage has been realized in the *New English Bible*. It reads: "To you the secret of the kingdom of God has been given; but to those who are outside everything comes by way of parables, so that (as scripture says) they may look and look, but see nothing; they may hear and hear, but understand nothing; otherwise they might turn to God and be forgiven."<sup>13</sup>

—> "If it be objected that this interpretation of the passage makes Jesus do violence to the Old Testament text, the answer is that this passage is a piece of Haggadah and that the passage from Isaiah is not cited as a proof-text but as an illustration. Further, it is not cited in the original but in the current Aramaic version, which, as we have already seen, departs from the Hebrew in several important particulars. And it may be added that Jewish practice permitted and approved a much greater freedom in the use of the Scriptures when quoted in Haggadah than would be allowable when strict interpretation of the Law was in question. Anyone who is familiar with the feats of exegesis performed in the homiletic Midrashim will find nothing startling in this case."<sup>14</sup>

We have conjectured that v 11-12 contain a genuine saying of Jesus which Mark interpolated as a second answer to the apostles' question about the parables in v 10. The word parables serving as the catchword, two analogous passages were brought together but not coordinated—a literary procedure much in evidence throughout the gospels.

If this conjecture is correct, v 11-12 were not necessarily concerned with parables at all. Certainly it is much easier to understand the passage as Jesus reflecting on his preaching and

the acceptance it received. So Jesus may well have been speaking of his ministry as he observed the disbelief and opposition of those to whom he was promising salvation, "perhaps at the time when he uttered the lament over the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (Lk 10:13-15)."<sup>15</sup>

If the object of v 11-12 was to show that parabolic teaching was calculated to harden the hearts of hearers, it is curious that the words in Is 6:9-10 which most strongly suggest this are precisely those which were omitted by Mark: "Make the heart of this people fat, and dull their ears, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts."

Mark's summary statement in v 33-34 can be regarded as a more precise estimation of the use of parables. After recording the parables of the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed, Mark added: "With many such parables he announced the word to them, so far as they were able to receive it. He did not speak to them without a parable; but privately he explained everything to his disciples."

This statement recognized that parables sometimes needed to be explained, and was in agreement with common rabbinical practice; but it would stand in contrast to the explanatory passage if parables in 11b were taken to mean parables in the proper sense.

Possibly the summary statement on parables in v 33-34 led Mark to insert the traditional interpretation of the parable of the sower (v 14-20) and the saying about the lamp in the group of sayings in v 21-25. "Is a lamp brought into the room to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? Surely it is brought in to be

set on the lampstand. For there is nothing hidden, except to be made manifest, and nothing has remained secret, except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (v 21-23). Regardless of when the saying was originally pronounced, it was well placed in this chapter.

As was mentioned above, the parable of the sower is the only place where the term *mysterion* appears in the synoptic gospels. Otherwise it is a pauline term, appearing some eighteen times in the apostle's writings. At whatever level of gospel formation it may have taken place, the joining of *mysterion* and kingdom of God resulted in a highly evocative combination. Like other Greek terms appropriated by the Jews it took on a new meaning without entirely losing its old one. This duplexity presented biblical writers with a literary and theological resource they were not slow to exploit.

*Mysterion* wavered in meaning between two apparently opposed ideas—mystery or secret, and revelation. "The NT writers—certainly a Hellenistic Jew like Paul—could hardly have been unaware of the meaning of 'mystery' in the pagan religion of their day, yet they do not set forth 'the mystery of the gospel' (Eph 6.19) in the guise of a new mystery-cult."<sup>16</sup> The good news of salvation was proclaimed abroad to all who would listen. "The mystery about which Paul writes is not a secret *gnosis* magically conferring immortality upon the few: it is the hidden plan of salvation for the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, which had been kept hidden through all the ages until now, when in these last times it has been disclosed in Jesus Christ and is now proclaimed by those who preach him—

i.e. the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (I Cor 4:1)—and it stands, an open secret, for all who will believe the good news.”<sup>17</sup>

Because of its dual background *mysterion* was uniquely fitted to bridge the gap between two aspects of the kingdom. On the one hand the kingdom was the plan of salvation revealed to all the world, while on the other it had not only been hidden, but in a sense remained hidden even after it was revealed.

One of the ways in which the bible expressed its sense of the mystery of the divine being was its insistence upon the hiddenness of God and all his ways. A sense of God’s power and majesty was probably the immediate result of the exodus. But continued dealings with the Lord impressed the Israelites with the fact that there were many aspects of his being that he had not yet revealed, and that men could not fully comprehend even those that were revealed. And this sense of God’s hiddenness increased as Israel’s difficulties increased, and as the sense of sin and the Lord’s transcendence increased, especially in postexilic times.

In Deuteronomy the Lord told Moses that if the people worshiped strange gods when they came into the land of Canaan, “that very day my anger will be kindled against them. I will abandon them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured” (31:17). Even more to the point is another saying in Deuteronomy: “The hidden things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may put into practice all the words of this law” (29:29).

#### KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

When the son of the Shunammite died Elias had to acknowledge that "the Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me" (2 K 4:27). And II Isaiah beheld all the pagan people rallying to the Lord, exclaiming:

God is with you only, and there is no other,  
no God besides him.  
Truly, with you God is hidden,  
the God of Israel, the savior.

45:14-15

Although struggling with the baffling question of retribution, Job was reproached for the questions he asked:

Can you find out the hidden things of God?  
can you find out the limits of Shaddai?  
It is higher than heaven—what can you do?  
deeper than sheol—what can you know?

11:7-8

Writing to the Corinthians about the gospel of the kingdom he proclaimed to them, Paul characterized it as "a wisdom of God, a mystery, which remained hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor 2:7). And contemplating Israel's rejection and ultimate salvation Paul exclaimed: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Rom 11:33).

Hebrew contains about a dozen different words meaning "to hide." Bearing in mind that "belief in a perfect reflection of thought by language" has been overworked at times,<sup>18</sup> we note Alan Richardson's conclusion that "this amazing wealth of syno-

nymy for 'hide' in the vocabulary of Hebrew is an index of a distinctive attitude of mind: the mind of Israel was characterized by a profound sense of the hiddenness of things, in marked contrast to Greek thought with its sanguine belief in the capacity of reason to probe the inmost secrets of reality."<sup>19</sup> Yet the hiddenness of God in the bible must be carefully distinguished from agnosticism in the modern sense; it was of the very essence of the message of the scriptures that this hidden God revealed himself and his intentions for creation.

Because of its background in classical Greek *mysterion* always retained this overtone of hiddenness, yet in the New Testament *mysterion* and revelation were inseparable. *Mysterion* was almost universally used in connection with words denoting revelation or publication for it was something quite other than a secret. Nor did it cease to be a *mysterion* even when it had been revealed, whereas of course a secret when revealed ceases to be a secret.

There is deep meaning therefore in v 10-11: "To you the *mysterion* of the kingdom of God has been given; but to those who are outside everything is in parables." God's very work of salvation, the kingdom, was at first hidden in God and then made present and operative in the person of Jesus. Jesus granted the kingdom as a pure grace to the least likely candidates: the poor, the humble, the outcasts who were aware of their dependence on God. On one occasion Jesus declared: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the wise and knowing and revealing them to babes. Yes, Father, for such was your good pleasure" (Mt 11:25). For those members of the chosen people who were convinced that they had merited a high place in the kingdom by their observance of the mosaic

law a kingdom granted as a pure grace was meaningless. The poor and sinners entered the kingdom before them.

Thus even after it was revealed the kingdom remained a mystery. To those who were outside everything was obscure. Even though the kingdom was proclaimed throughout the land it remained an incomprehensible mystery apart from personal faith in God's purpose of salvation. A mystery of election was also implicit in the proclamation of the kingdom: that one man saw but that another one did not. Many persons witnessed the miracles and heard the proclamation but the number of those who responded immediately was few. "Narrow is the gate and hard is the way that leads to Life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7:14). Life was a synonym for the kingdom of God; it was the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom to the little flock (Lk 12:32). Yet the kingdom would grow and the harvest would be great.

This implication reaffirmed a point already made in the beatitudes—that the kingdom was an entirely gratuitous, unmerited gift granted not to those who thought they had the first seat in the kingdom, but to those who were regarded as having no right to enter the kingdom at all.

There is a distinction, then, between those to whom the kingdom was given and those who were outside, for whom everything was meaningless. "There is no reason to suppose that Mark is not in fact giving us a summary of the teaching of Jesus himself upon this matter."<sup>20</sup> The problem, discussed by Paul in Rom 9-11, is the hardening of Israel.

Basically Jesus defined his mission in terms of the suffering servant of II Isaiah, and at the time there was a strong identifica-

tion between the suffering servant and the historical Isaiah. At the time of his call to the prophetic office Isaiah had seen the glory of God in the temple of Jerusalem and knew the whole earth to be full of it (Is 6:1-4). But Israel remained blind to the divine glory and would remain deaf to his preaching. In characteristically Hebraic poetic form, this result was expressed as a command in v 9-10: "Go and say to this people: 'Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive.'"

Israel's failure to respond to the preaching of the servant-prophet was a precedent for her failure to respond to the preaching of the servant-messiah. For her everything happened "in parables," and we have noted that the Hebrew *mashal* signified "not only 'parable' in our English sense of story-with-a-deeper-meaning but also 'riddle,' 'dark saying,' 'obscurity.' The whole life, death and resurrection of Christ are a 'parable' in the deep double meaning of the word: they enable those to whom the mystery is 'given' to understand the truth of God's salvation, but to those who are 'outside' they are riddles and obscurities."<sup>21</sup>

Both Matthew and Luke altered Mark's singular "mysterion of the kingdom" to the plural: "to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom." It is possible that by the time Matthew and Luke were written the mysteries had come to mean the sacraments. This usage was common in the second century and onward, and Matthew and Luke may have wished this meaning to be so understood. The Vulgate translates *mysterion* as *sacramentum* in a number of places.

Finally, the kingdom was aptly called a *mysterion* for a reason which verges on the philosophical. "The paradox of revelation, as



the bible understands it, is that God can reveal himself to sinful man only by veiling the brightness of his true glory. This veiling of his brightness is a gracious act of the divine condescension: the true light, appearing among men, was veiled in order that they might see. Otherwise they would have been blinded by excess of light. Thus the incarnation itself was necessarily a veiling as well as a revealing of the light; if it had not been the former, it could not have been the latter. Spiritual truth, if we may use the language of Thomas Aquinas, must be mediated through corporeal images; in *statu viatoris* there is no direct vision of God, for the sight would sear our eyes; the light can reach us, in the phrase which Thomas is fond of quoting from Dionysius, only when 'wrapped in a maze of sacred veils.'<sup>22</sup>

The word of God veiled his brightness in the robe of human nature, so that God revealed himself by the paradoxical act of hiding himself in our humanity. "So, too, the divine life of the Church, his continuing body on the earth, necessarily involves a veiling of the inner mystery of its existence: 'your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col 3.3); but it will be fully revealed in its glorious reality at the manifestation of Christ (Col 3.4). Similarly the Church's sacraments are veils penetrable only by faith ('Beneath these signs are hidden Glorious things to sight forbidden,' Thomas Aquinas, *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem*).'<sup>23</sup>

At the same time that he revealed himself God remained hidden. Paul used *mysterion*, his very own term in a sense, when he wanted to express this idea. God "has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong, the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are. In order to manifest eternity He has chosen time; to reveal His Spirit He has chosen flesh; to

#### THE REASON FOR PARABLES

reveal His divinity, man; to cause His sovereignty to shine forth, the cross; for His own presence, our own lives; He has chosen the Church, to unite all men; the stammerings of His servants, to make His voice sound forth; the catastrophes of the history of the nations, to lead us on the way to the new Jerusalem. In view of each of these declarations, it is striking to see the recurrence of the term mystery in Paul."<sup>24</sup>

It was a mystery rich in meaning that Jesus declared to his apostles when he said to them: "To you the mystery of the kingdom of God has been given, but to those who are outside everything is obscure" (Mk 4:10-11).

## Eschatology: Unrealized and Realized

IN its original form the gospel was a proclamation of the good news of salvation—that was our starting point in this study. We then traced the involved process by which this kerygma was gradually put into writing and our four gospels eventually edited. It is important for our appreciation of the gospels that we know the general nature of this process of putting into writing and the literary criteria and practices followed therein.

Next we applied these general considerations to a relatively short and easily controllable portion of scripture, the beatitudes. There we saw how apparent discrepancies can reveal various reinterpretations, various levels of meaning and, at times, the original form of the gospel passage. Then we moved into a broader and less controllable field, the parables, where the original meaning and varieties of reinterpretation are not easily grasped because of the extent of the parable passages and the extent of the reinterpretation found.

Our last step in this study will carry us into an even broader field, eschatology. But the field is so broad and there are so many hints of the development which went before the present gospel texts that, as J. A. T. Robinson has observed in his *Jesus and His Coming*, "almost every investigator can arrive at a different reconstruction."<sup>1</sup>

This is a rather alarming state of affairs when we reflect that eschatology is of immediate concern to contemporary man. The question of the last things is as much a problem for us today as the question of the first things was for Christians around the turn of the century.

Our procedure here will be to sketch a number of representative eschatological reconstructions (ch 7-10), and then summarize the present state of the question (ch 11).

We have already noted that throughout the last century or so New Testament studies passed through phases of noneschatology, unrealized eschatology and realized eschatology. Now scholars are working their way through proleptic or inaugurated eschatology, toward what is hoped will be a satisfactory system of Christian eschatology.

The eschatology-less period of New Testament studies is identified with the period of liberal criticism. The term liberal criticism is used here simply because it has become the accepted designation of a particular period and type of nineteenth century biblical criticism. During this period it was discovered that the gospels contained interpretation and this interpretation was considered perversion. Some critics regarded everything supernatural, and especially anything eschatological, as interpretation and they set about ridding the gospels of those elements. The residue they took to be a picture of the "true historical Jesus."

This process is concisely summarized in Kee and Young's widely used *Understanding the New Testament*: "With the rise of biblical criticism (that is, the application of the same kind of analytical historical and literary methods to the Bible that were

used in the analysis of any other works of literature or history) in the late eighteenth century, the way was opened for the student of the Bible to select those parts that he believed to be authentic or authoritative. By careful analysis, the critics sought to reconstruct the historical situations out of which the stories about Jesus originated. They chose from among the sayings and stories those that were considered to be authentic and assigned the others to their respective sources. Applied to the Gospels, this method made it possible to dismiss as unimportant those parts that speak of the return of Christ, the throne of judgment, and the resurrection. They could be regarded as either accommodations by Jesus to the primitive outlook of his time, or as misconceptions that originated in the early church and were fictitiously, though piously, ascribed by the Gospel writers to Jesus. Then the critic could proceed to reconstruct, along the lines of his own presuppositions, his portrait of the real Jesus. Accordingly, Jesus has been variously represented as a poetic dreamer, a social reformer, a moral idealist, and a gentle prophet and messenger of the love of God."<sup>2</sup>

This radical criticism combined favorably with the optimism widely prescribed to at the time—a belief in mankind's inevitable progress. The theory held that history is a story of man's unceasing progress from error to truth, from incompleteness to complete fulfillment of his potentialities. "Such 'primitive' elements of the biblical record as eschatology could be written off as expendable antiques, or as figurative representations of the very goal of which the philosophers were speaking in more sophisticated language. In either case, eschatology was no longer to be taken at face value as an important part of the biblical faith. The 'Kingdom of

God' was at best an archaic symbol for the culmination of the process of inevitable progress."<sup>8</sup>

It may appear that the above description sounds very much like the approach to the gospels that we have followed, and to some degree this is true; but there are some important differences. In its initial stages biblical criticism combined truth and error. The critical studies of the sources of the Pentateuch combined solid findings with unacceptable presuppositions and an over-enthusiastic application; and this was largely true of New Testament criticism as well. Such an either-or position is no longer accepted in modern biblical scholarship.

The appearance of Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*<sup>4</sup> was a major factor in reversing this trend. "It is to the credit of Schweitzer that when scholars were content to interpret the teaching of Jesus in gradualistic and evolutionary terms, he jarred the world of scholarship loose from its mistakes and forced them to hear in Jesus' message the note of imminent and decisive divine action."<sup>5</sup>

Schweitzer showed that eschatology cannot be eliminated from the gospel record without distorting beyond recognition the picture of what Jesus historically was. He proposed a reconstruction that put the announcement of the impending new age at the center of Jesus' whole life and message. "After his *Quest of the Historical Jesus* it was no longer possible to dispose of difficult eschatological passages by declaring them unauthentic or treating them as marginal and unimportant."<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately Schweitzer also held that Jesus was a mere man, that he was utterly mistaken in expecting the arrival of the kingdom during his own lifetime, and that he went up to

Jerusalem to "force his foes to put him to death and thereby set in motion the wheels of destiny that would bring in the still entirely future Kingdom."<sup>7</sup> In Schweitzer's view Jesus died a disillusioned man.

According to Schweitzer's eschatological reconstruction the kingdom for Jesus was entirely in the future; it was in no respect present during his public ministry. Jesus expected the new age to arrive in the immediate future in a catastrophic manner, all at once. Schweitzer's "vigorous emphasis on the decisively new order that lay just ahead ignores the equally clear teaching which stated that this new order was already beginning. He had to interpret the parables of growth so that the growth from small beginnings had no meaning (Mt 13:1-33; Mk 4:1-34; Lk 8:4-8, 13:18-20)."<sup>8</sup>

This reconstruction of Jesus' teaching was known as thoroughgoing or consistent eschatology. Dodd also refers to it as futurist eschatology.<sup>9</sup> In his view it represents a compromise. "In the presence of one set of sayings which appeared to contemplate the coming of the Kingdom of God as future, and another set which appeared to contemplate it as already present, they offered an interpretation which represented it as coming, very, very soon."<sup>10</sup>

Of thoroughgoing eschatology Oscar Cullmann has written that the entire perspective in which it places the New Testament is not correct. It regards the future coming of the messianic age as the mid-point of the history of salvation, "whereas the mid-point of time in the entire New Testament and *already for Jesus* is rather the historical word of Jesus himself."<sup>11</sup>

Schweitzer's positive contribution was to expose the error of eliminating the eschatological, but thereafter his position became paradoxical. "As an exegete and historian, Albert Schweitzer

has rightly discerned and denounced this error committed by so many modern historians of the life of Jesus. But as a dogmatist he has rendered himself guilty of the same error by trying to eliminate eschatology from the gospel, after having recognized its capital importance."<sup>12</sup>

In his *Apostolic Preaching and Parables of the Kingdom* Dodd supplies a necessary corrective to this view of the teachings of Jesus. He emphasizes "the equally clear teaching" that the new order had already begun, and in Jesus' teaching he finds the accent on achieved realization. This reconstruction eventually became known as realized eschatology.

Dodd, like Schweitzer, allows no room for a growth in the kingdom, but for a different reason: the kingdom was not entirely in the future and would not arrive all at once, but was entirely present. In a study of Dodd's eschatology E. E. Wolfzorn writes: "The essential proposition in realized eschatology is that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a prelude to the Kingdom of God; it is the Kingdom of God in so far as history can contain it."<sup>13</sup> Dodd emphasizes the aspect of realized eschatology in Jesus' teaching and transfers the future aspects of this teaching on the kingdom entirely beyond history, to the eternal order.

In his *Jesus and His Coming* Robinson points out that an ambiguity is attached to the phrase "realized eschatology." In one sense it represents the view that the kingdom of God was fully realized in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that none of his teachings referred to a second coming. In this sense Schweitzer's eschatology is completely realized.

"On his definition, nothing can happen after that final crisis.



Or, rather, nothing should have happened after it—and to that extent Schweitzer represents the hope of Jesus as a completely unrealized eschatology: "The death of Jesus is the end of eschatology!" . . . But, in another sense, applied within the period of Jesus' life-time, the phrase is used to emphasize that the Kingdom was already a present fact *during the Ministry*, and not simply something to which he still looked forward. In this sense Schweitzer and Dodd represent opposite poles, Schweitzer believing that to the very end Jesus saw the Kingdom purely as a future event, Dodd that from the moment Jesus came into Galilee he proclaimed it as an existing reality."<sup>14</sup>

Dodd lays great emphasis on the fact that Christianity was an historical religion. Unlike mysticism and nature religion the Christian and Jewish religions accepted the nonrecurrent particularity of events. They likewise admitted and defended teleology. Historical events were the vehicles of God's revelation of himself and his purpose, but not all historical events were revelation in the proper sense: only those in which God chose to reveal himself in a special way.

"Since one event may be more significant and meaningful than another, it is not impossible that there could be one event more significant than all others. Such a theory is in perfect accord with the unique and unrepeatable character of the events of history. In fact, Christianity recognizes not only the possibility, but the actual existence, of such an event in history. This one, unique, unrepeatable, fully revelatory action of God is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup>

. In the teaching of Jesus Dodd finds the accent on achieved

realization. "Jesus saw in His own ministry the coming of the Kingdom of God."<sup>16</sup> "We know that Jesus did regard His own ministry as the culmination of God's dealings with His people."<sup>17</sup> Dodd subscribes moreover to the theory that the first Christians thought of resurrection, exaltation and the second coming as inseparable parts of a single divine event.

Jesus had risen from the dead and any day would be seen on the clouds of heaven. "It was not an early advent that they proclaimed, but an immediate advent. They proclaimed it not so much as a future event for which men should prepare by repentance, but rather as the impending corroboration of a present fact: the new age is already here, and because it is here men should repent. . . . That was what their Lord had meant, they thought, by saying, 'The Kingdom of God has come upon you,' while He also bade they pray, 'Thy Kingdom come.'"<sup>18</sup>

The Christians believed that the eschaton, the final and decisive act of God, had already entered human experience. "In the earliest days it was possible to hold this conviction in the indivisible unity of an experience which included also the expectation of an immediate overt confirmation of its truth" (*Preaching* 34). God's saving action had already passed through the stages of sending the messiah, his death, resurrection and exaltation. "It now trembled upon the verge of its conclusion in his second advent" (ibid 34).

But time passed and the Lord did not come again. "The tremendous crisis in which they had felt themselves to be living passed, without reaching its expected issue. The second advent of the Lord, which had seemed to be impending as the completion of that which they had already 'seen and heard,' came to appear

as a second crisis yet in the future. So soon as only a few years had passed, say three or four, this division in the originally indivisible experience must have insensibly taken place in their minds, for they were intercalary years, so to speak, not provided for in their first calendar of the divine purpose" (ibid 34-35).

The futurist aspects of the kingdom as portrayed in the kerygma and the synoptic gospels Dodd attributes largely to reinterpretation on the part of the apostolic Church. Yet he recognizes that the teaching of Jesus also had some reference to the future, for Jesus was a prophet and prediction was a rule of a prophet. We may take it to be probable, therefore, that Jesus did on occasion utter predictions.

In particular Jesus predicted his suffering and death, his resurrection and the destruction of the temple. But this vision "is in the first place insight into the actual situation" and does not exclude error (ibid 51). Jesus actually expected the tribulation of Judea to follow more closely upon his own death than it actually did (ibid 49).

The first Christians proclaimed an immediate second coming of Jesus which, "as soon as only a few years had passed, say three or four," became a new source of crisis. Dodd is of the opinion that the belief in a second coming was not based on any genuine teaching of Jesus, but that "the primitive Christian community, with the exception of its better minds (later epistles of Paul and the gospel of John), misunderstood and misinterpreted the eschatological teaching of Jesus."<sup>19</sup> More specifically "the expectation of the second coming found in the kerygmatic preaching is actually a deviation from the original teaching of Jesus."<sup>20</sup>

For Dodd then sayings which spoke of the kingdom as in the future meant only that men will become aware that the kingdom had already arrived. In Mk 8:38 for example we read: "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." The meaning of this passage, according to Dodd, is that "Jesus (or the Son of Man) will acknowledge or deny men in the supernal world; that is, the acknowledgment or denial is eternal in quality" (*Parables* 71).

"It is doubtful, then, whether the earlier tradition contained explicit predictions of an historical second coming of Jesus as Son of Man, though there are passages which refer to such a 'coming' beyond history" (ibid 72). "There is no coming of the Son of Man in history 'after' his coming in Galilee and Jerusalem, whether soon or late, for there is no before and after in the eternal order" (ibid 83).

How then did belief in a second coming arise? While Dodd does not find a reference to a second coming in any of the sayings about the coming of the son of man, he does find a prediction of the resurrection (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Since Jesus designated himself the son of man he must have expected that he would be victorious after death. It is therefore credible that Jesus predicted not only his death but also his resurrection.

According to Dodd Jesus thus predicted a crisis in which he would die and his followers suffer persecution; and he also foretold catastrophe for the Jewish people and their temple (ibid 48). Jesus also predicted, in terms which we cannot precisely illucidate upon, his own survival of death. But whereas Jesus had

referred to one single event, the Church "made a distinction between two events, one past, his resurrection from the dead, and one future, his coming on the clouds" (ibid 77).

But if Jesus did expect the arrival of the kingdom very soon after his death and resurrection, what are we to say of the ethical teaching attributed to him in the gospels? Did he preach an interim ethics, "in the sense of precepts for the life of the disciples during the very short interval before normal conditions of human life cease to be?" (ibid 79). Dodd affirms that those sayings bearing an ethical teaching cannot be interpreted convincingly in this sense, since too much would be attributed to reinterpretation.

Therefore "we seem to be confronted with two diverse strains in the teaching of Jesus, one of which appears to contemplate the indefinite continuance of human life under historical conditions, while the other appears to suggest a speedy end to these conditions. A drastic criticism might eliminate the one strain or the other, but both are deeply embedded in the earliest form of tradition known to us" (ibid 79-80).

According to Dodd's reconstruction of eschatology the second coming results from the Church's reinterpretation and is not based on any genuine teaching of Jesus. After allowing so great an invention to reinterpretation, Dodd's rejection of reinterpreted ethics smacks of straining at the gnat. But there is a consideration of an even more serious nature—what kind of Church could have misunderstood and misinterpreted Jesus' teaching in so important a matter?

With the passing of time Dodd himself has come to recognize

that his reconstruction has its shortcomings. He set forth his system in *Parables of the Kingdom* and *The Apostolic Preaching* (1935), and *History and the Gospel* (1938). In *Parables* he refers to his system as "realized eschatology." In a more recent work, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953), he refers to realized eschatology as a "not altogether felicitous term" and cites several emendations that have been suggested, among them inaugurated eschatology.<sup>21</sup> But this term seems to be a vagary and contradicts Dodd's usual position.<sup>22</sup>

## Proleptic Eschatology

Just as Schweitzer's thoroughgoing eschatology was a reaction to liberal criticism, so Dodd's realized eschatology was a reaction to Schweitzer's system. In its time and situation each was necessary and made positive contributions, yet the discussion did not stop with Dodd.

In the introduction to his own study of eschatology, *Promise and Fulfilment*,<sup>1</sup> Werner George Kümmel, professor at the University of Marburg, summarizes the state of the question as follows: "On the one hand stands the *konsequent* eschatological view of Albert Schweitzer that Jesus in close connection with Jewish apocalyptic made the announcement of the imminent end of the world the central theme of his message and expected his appearance as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, first in his lifetime, and then in direct connection with his death. On the other hand . . . a very large section of British and American scholars, under the influence of C. H. Dodd, eliminate the 'futurist' eschatology more or less completely from Jesus' preaching, and consider it to be misunderstanding on the part of the Christian community, a rejudaizing, or a consequence of the penetration of apocalyptic" (15-16).

According to Dodd Christians first expected an immediate

parousia in direct connection with the resurrection-exaltation; they then expected a parousia in the near future, but as a distinct event; while in Christian doctrine the parousia, properly understood, has a purely symbolic status. Unquestionably, studies of eschatology and parousia written since Dodd's *Apostolic Preaching* and *Parables of the Kingdom* have been written with his position in mind, and are in a sense readjustments to his eschatological system.

In contrast to Dodd's emphasis on realized eschatology Kümmel insists that the kingdom is fundamentally future. While Dodd translates Mk 1:15 as "the Kingdom has come," Kümmel translates it as "the Kingdom is coming near" (ibid 23). Apart from the philological merits of the translation, it is also indicative of Kümmel's starting point. He finds this conclusion confirmed by "statements which presume or expressly mention not the nearness but the futurity of the Kingdom of God" (ibid 25). And he cites as proof the Lord's prayer ("thy kingdom come") and, as the clearest instance, Mk 9:11: "Truly, I say to you, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come in power."

Some of the persons present would see the kingdom arrive in their own lifetime. "Yet the absence of an unrestricted promise to all Jesus' contemporaries to experience the Kingdom of God implies that it cannot be expected within a very short period" (ibid 28-29). Kümmel cites Lk 17:22 ("The time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the son of man, and you will not see it") as proof that "Jesus on the one hand reckoned on the future appearance of the 'days of the Son of Man' and on the other hand expects that his disciples will one day ardently



await this appearance for which they long. This must surely mean that Jesus foresees a time when he will have left his disciples without the hoped-for parousia having occurred or become clearly visible" (ibid 29).

With this statement the question of an interval in time between Jesus' death and the parousia is posed. Kümmel expounds a basically futurist eschatology—an interval of time was fixed between the imminent death of Jesus and the eschatological coming. In the mind of Jesus all other elements in the eschatological hope were identified with this anticipated coming: full establishment of the kingdom, consummation, judgment.

On the other hand the kingdom was already present during the ministry of Jesus. Kümmel translates Lk 17:30: "The Kingdom of God will not come according to calculations made in advance, nor will a search have to be made for it; for lo, the Kingdom of God is present in our midst" (ibid 35). Kümmel thus concludes that the kingdom of God had already become effective in Jesus and in the events appearing in connection with his person. The eschatological "day" and the coming judgment coincided with the future coming of the kingdom, and men's fate in the eschatological judgment was determined by their attitude toward Jesus during his ministry (cf Mt 19:28). "For Jesus the present is linked in an unusual way with the coming eschatological event, giving the present an eschatological stamp" (ibid 48).

The promise of the coming kingdom of God made the present appear as a decisively eschatological present. The expectation of the future kingdom of God and of the salvation it provided was closely connected with the certainty that the promise had already

in some manner been fulfilled, although the futurity of the promised gift was not affected (*ibid* 53-54).

The eschatological consummation was already effective in the present in that the eschaton had showed itself effective in Jesus. Consequently men were distinguished by their acceptance or rejection of the son of Man. Yet the eschaton was expected to be fully effective only in the near future. "Thus the fundamental presupposition for the future eschatological judgment was created already in the present, in which Jesus was the determining factor" (*ibid* 195).

That the eschaton was already present in some sense was shown by the victory of Jesus over the devils and by all his other messianic acts. Jesus' proclamation of the good news of the future kingdom of God received its particular and decisive character when Jesus brought about what was expected from the eschatological future. Jesus' eschatological preaching indicates the actual presence of the person who would bring about salvation in the last days (*ibid* 111). "Jesus connects the present, with the expected future, because the encounter with the man Jesus in the present demands a decision which will be the determining factor for the eschatological verdict of Jesus when he comes as the Son of Man" (*ibid* 142).

And when was the kingdom to arrive? Jesus had said that only a few of his contemporaries would witness the coming of the kingdom (Mk 9:1), implying "that it cannot be expected within a very short period" (*ibid* 28-29). Since it was expected that many of his contemporaries would die before the coming of the kingdom, "Jesus expected the coming of the eschaton to be at hand

but yet not very near" (ibid 44). Matthew 23:38 implies that "a longish interval of time must be expected between his death and resurrection on the one hand and the parousia on the other" (ibid 82).

More specifically, Kümmel believes, Jesus expected the kingdom to arrive within the lifetime of his own generation, for appended to the parable of the fig tree in all three synoptics is the saying: "Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place" (Mk 13:30). Kümmel argues that in the context of Mark "all these things" clearly designated "the whole of the eschatological happenings including the final parousia" (ibid 60). In his mind there is no doubt that the passage in Mark means that the events leading up to the end would occur before Jesus' generation had ended.

Jesus then placed side by side the beliefs that the kingdom of God was expected soon and that it was already present. Since neither set of sayings can be legitimately eliminated from the sources, the interval between resurrection and parousia is firmly established.

But one wonders in what sense the kingdom was present during the interval period. Kümmel insists that the kingdom present and the kingdom to follow the parousia were quite different. Nowhere do the texts set forth the idea of "an actual Kingdom of God present in the life of Jesus' disciples" (ibid 126). During the interim period the kingdom was present in the works of Jesus alone and did not represent "independent of his person and his works, a power on the earth" (ibid 128). Like Dodd, Kümmel finds that growth was not the main point of the parables of growth, for they did not lend support to "the idea that Jesus

thought of a Kingdom of God developing on earth," or to "the assumption that Jesus announced a gradual penetration of the world by the forces of the Kingdom of God" (ibid 129-132). After a lengthy examination of the parable of the tares (Mt 13:24f), the author concludes that this parable also did not speak of the present existence and growth of the Kingdom of God. Rather, it showed that the present possessed a definite eschatological character because of the announcement of the coming Kingdom through Jesus (ibid 136).

Contending that Mt 16:18 ("You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church") does not belong to the oldest Jesus tradition, Kümmel insists that Jesus did not wish to collect a congregation around him in his lifetime, or even to gather the remnant. There can be no question of the presence of the kingdom of God in the congregation during his lifetime. Jesus nowhere said or intimated that the presence of the coming kingdom of God would show itself in the fellowship of his disciples during the interval between his death and the parousia. "Jesus saw the Kingdom of God to be present before the parousia, which he thought to be imminent, only in his own person and his works; he knew no other realization of the eschatological consummation" (ibid 140).

When Jesus placed side by side the two concepts of the kingdom of God—expected and present—at the same time he emphasized that the precise hour of its coming was unknown. Kümmel accepts neither Schweitzer's nor Dodd's position on this matter, especially Dodd's interpretation of futurist eschatology. "Dodd is treading a path barred by methodology when he interprets the eschatological conceptions of the future as purely symbolic" (ibid

146). The fact that Jesus restricted the imminent coming of the kingdom of God to his own generation indicates that for him the future as an actual happening in time was essential. The dimension of time and God's action in a definite future were indispensable.

For his part, Rudolf Bultmann acknowledges fully that Jesus meant the eschatological prediction to be understood as something in the future and that Jesus considered his own appearance as an event in time. "But the value of this exegetical judgment is at once taken away when Bultmann interprets the 'futurist' eschatology as nothing but a part of the mythological picture of the world from which we must free the New Testament" (ibid 147).

Kümmel's system hinges largely on the interpretation he gives Mk 13:30: "Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place." But Kümmel is curiously restricted in his consideration of possible meanings for the text, and he interprets it with utmost literalness. "All these things" means "the events leading up to the end" and "generation" is the generation of Jesus (ibid 60). One inevitable consequence of this position is that "this prediction of Jesus was not realized and it is therefore impossible to assert that Jesus was not mistaken about this" (ibid 149). Kümmel hastens to add however that it was only a small mistake. The number of texts which placed a definite limit on the imminent expectation (Mt 10:23; Mk 9:1; 13:30) is small, so we can conclude that this idea did not receive much emphasis in Jesus' message. The few texts which put a definite limit on the imminence of the kingdom of God contrast with a much larger number which represent the time when the king-

dom of God would come to be threateningly near, but yet unknown. Some texts expressly emphasized that the time had to remain completely unknown (Mk 13:32), so that even Jesus could not know it.

Moreover, discerning a contradiction between the prediction of a concrete date for the coming of the kingdom of God and the emphatic statement that this date could not be known, Kümmel says that it really doesn't matter. "The solution of this problem is of very subordinate importance because the question of the appointed date of the Kingdom of God was for Jesus in no way a vital concern" (ibid 151).

The ministry of Jesus, according to Kümmel, was characterized by a proclamation of the imminent coming of the kingdom and an attestation of its presence in his person. Although the prediction of the imminent coming of the kingdom was not fulfilled, he argues, it does not follow that the statements about the future lose their significance and become unimportant.

In speaking of the future coming of the kingdom, Jesus' sole intention was to make it clear to men that they were living in the last days, that the consummation of salvation could not be long delayed. This interpretation, Kümmel would seem to say, is the true meaning which Jesus' contemporaries should have grasped despite his errors, and the true meaning which we are to derive from Jesus' teaching today. Jesus spoke of imminence, but certainty, it would appear, is to be taken as the "real" and perennial meaning of what he said.

While the imminent expectation was necessarily a contemporary form of expression which could be detached from Jesus' message, the future expectation was essential and indispensable.

Jesus, it would follow, was wrong about the imminence but right about the futurity, a futurity which has lasted down to our own time. And Jesus' insistence on the imminence is our assurance of the certainty of the consummation.

More recent writers use the same argument to solve the difficulty arising from Jesus' apparent mistake about the date of the parousia. Eric C. Rust has written in his *Salvation History* that "all the evidence thus goes to indicate that our Lord anticipated an imminent return of himself as Son of Man subsequent to his death and resurrection. It would happen in the life-span of his contemporaries." But in estimating the significance of our Lord's understanding at this point, we must bear in mind, among other things, "that the date and nature of the parousia are not to be confused. Our Lord could have shared with his contemporaries the expectation of an imminent Day of the Lord, and yet still have had a unique insight into its nature."<sup>2</sup>

Other writers object that this solution and Jesus' possession of a fully divine nature are incompatible.

If Jesus had announced only God's future eschatological action his eschatology would have remained essentially Jewish. But "Jesus linked the present in a quite peculiar way to the future by speaking of his return as judge and by making the attitude of men to the earthly Jesus the criterion for the verdict of Jesus, the eschatological judge" (Kümmel, *op cit* 153). Acceptance of the teaching of Jesus meant hoping not merely for the future, but hoping with an assurance based on the experience of God's redemptive action in the present. The intrinsic meaning of Jesus'

eschatological message was that in him the kingdom of God came into being and in him it would be consummated.

Reginald H. Fuller in his *Mission and Achievement of Jesus* also reacts against Dodd's realized eschatology.<sup>3</sup> Patterning his thought after Kümmel, Fuller characterizes the presence of the kingdom during Jesus' lifetime "proleptic."

Thus, speaking of Mt 11:12, Fuller points out that the passage has been translated: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence" or "is exercising its force." Even if the latter is the correct interpretation, he says, there is no need to follow Dodd in supposing this to mean that with Jesus the kingdom had already come. It need mean no more than that the proclamation of the coming kingdom was taking place, and that in this proleptic sense the kingdom, though not arrived, was operative in advance. "The reign of God is already breaking in proleptically in the proclamation and signs of Jesus (that is the difference between the time of Jesus's ministry and the time of John the Baptist), but it would be to overstate the case to say that with Jesus the Kingdom of God has actually come" (op cit 32).

In the same vein, Robinson writes that he also prefers the term proleptic eschatology in order to "indicate that, while the Kingdom comes in power, and the hour of the Son of man arrives, only with the death of Jesus, yet the signs of the messianic age are already to be seen, in anticipation, 'before the time' (Mt 8:29), in his words and deeds."<sup>4</sup>

As for the parousia, Fuller sees Jesus' declaration in Mk 9:1 ("Some of those standing here will not taste death before they



see the kingdom of God come in power”) as partially fulfilled in the resurrection (unlike Kümmel) and partially in error (like Kümmel). “That the prediction of the parousia was not fulfilled in the way it was uttered is not an insuperable difficulty. No doubt it was partially fulfilled in the exaltation of Jesus, and its final consummation delayed much longer than the prophetic foreshortening of the saying suggests. But whatever the difficulties, there can be no doubt that it implies the coming of the Kingdom of God as a future event” (Fuller, *op cit* 28).

## Fully Inaugurated Eschatology

ON the whole it might be said that Robinson's interpretation of the eschatological message of Jesus as given in his *Jesus and His Coming* is quite similar to Dodd's, although he affords his reader many new and enlightening insights into the subject.

For the precritical theologian and the modern fundamentalist the formulation of the Christian doctrine of the last things is a matter of assembling texts, regarded as predictions, and arranging them into a coherent map of the end. The more recent trend, on the other hand, holds that "the true character of the biblical statements about the end of the world, as about its beginning, is not that of literal history but of myth" (op cit 10). The various elements of the end picture are expressed as events but they are not to be viewed as literal occurrences.

This latter method, says Robinson, is as much an evasion as the former. "Since Christianity is not a system of ideas, but an interpretation of history, no sound or lasting foundation of Christian doctrine can be erected on such evasion" (ibid 10). It is instructive to judge Robinson's own work by the same standard.

There can be no doubt that the early Church expected Jesus to come again, but the question is: what did Jesus expect? In this regard Dodd attributes futurist eschatology to the Church. However, as Robinson observes, "it would be impossible simply to be

content with the expectation of the New Testament Church, if at this point it could be maintained that it had seriously misconceived the expectation of Jesus. For if the Church represented Jesus as promising to return when he himself gave no such promise, clearly the foundation of the credal clause and of the whole Christian hope would be imperiled" (ibid 12). And it can be observed that the more exclusively one relies on the written scriptures as the one font of revelation, the greater the difficulties in interpretation.

Taking as his starting point the Church's expectation that Christ would come again, Robinson makes a useful distinction between the parousia proper and a number of associated elements. He defines the parousia as "the expectation of the coming of Christ from heaven to earth in manifest and final glory" (ibid 18). It is this expectation he refers to by the term parousia, and he regards it as the distinctively Christian center of the New Testament hope. Associated with the parousia are other elements in the traditional eschatology, distinct in origin, but which have been merged in the parousia in Christianity. These are the day of the Lord, the last judgment, the ingathering of the elect, and the end of the world.

The most obvious explanation for the parousia—as expressed by the universal hope of the early Christians (with minor exceptions)—is that Jesus himself taught the early Christians to expect him. Ultimately "it is then to Jesus' own words and, therefore, to the evidence of the Gospels, that we are driven" (ibid 24). But Robinson first examines the other New Testament documents to see what light they shed on the Church's own understanding of the parousia expectation, and to find the origin of that hope. Neither the epistles nor Acts attempt to account for the parousia

belief which they generally presupposed. "They do not tell us where it came from; and they never claim that it goes back to Jesus" (ibid 24). But Robinson is quick to recognize that this silence cannot be pressed.

The parousia first appears in 1 Thessalonians, the earliest epistle, wherein Paul implied that he had preached the doctrine during his original visit to Thessalonica. This would have been about the year AD 50. But it is nearly impossible to find an earlier reference since "nowhere does (Paul) refer to it as part of the tradition that he himself 'received'" (ibid 27).

Nor does Robinson find any convincing references to the parousia in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter's exhortation in his second sermon is one of the few passages of any interest in this regard. After sketching the story of Jesus, Peter urged his hearers to repent and have faith, "that your sins may be wiped out and that the Lord may send the times of refreshment, and that he may send the Christ destined beforehand for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time of universal restoration comes" (Acts 3:20f). Finding no convincing reference to the parousia, Robinson concludes: "We are left with the surprising conclusion that no evidence is to be found that the parousia expectation formed part of the earliest strata of apostolic Christianity" (ibid 29). But again he hastens to add that the argument from silence is always precarious. There is a great gulf between establishing the silence of the evidence and the absence of the belief.

However Robinson discovers two factors which suggest that this silence was not entirely fortuitous. In the first place, the gospel message as presented in the acts does not read as though its last term had been lopped off or accidentally omitted. What was affirmed to have happened already constituted an essentially

complete realization of the Lord's saving purpose, for the decisive messianic act had been completed. While all had not yet been summed up, all that was to be had already been set in motion. This view of the balance between "already" and "yet to come" Robinson aptly labels "fully inaugurated eschatology."

The second factor suggesting that the silence of the epistles and Acts on the origin of the parousia hope was not entirely fortuitous is the evidence of the earliest credal statements. The Church's vivid consciousness of the present lordship of Christ does not imply that she did not see Christ as Lord of the future also. "What does seem to be clear, however, is that it is not until the second century that this hope is felt to require for its basis a separate affirmation that he will come in glory and judgment. . . . However vivid its expectation of Jesus, the Church remained content to express its certainty about the future as part of its conviction of the present and continuing sovereignty of Christ, already enthroned as history's Lord and history's Judge" (ibid 34).

The parousia expectation eludes us, says Robinson, during the twenty years that separate the crucifixion and Paul's arrival at Thessalonica. But this gap will be of little significance if it can be shown that the expectation goes back to Jesus himself.

After examining various gospel texts advanced as indicating that Jesus expected a second coming, Robinson concludes that there is nothing to suggest that Jesus shared the expectation of that return in glory which the Church entertained and ascribed to him (ibid 57).

Robinson sees two closely related ideas involved in the parousia idea proper, vindication (victory out of defeat) and visitation

(coming among men in power and judgment). According to Robinson, Jesus expected the vindication but not the visitation. In all the parousia texts examined, he says, there is the thought of a vindication out of present tribulation, linked to the imminent climax of the historic ministry of Jesus. But there is no suggestion in any of these sayings of any moment other than or separate from this climax (ibid 43).

Mark 14:62 is the crucial text for Robinson's theory, since it is the text most resistant to a parousia-less interpretation. The text gives Jesus' reply to the challenge of the high priest: "Are you the messiah?" Jesus answers: "I am; and you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of God, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

The verse contains references to Ps 110:1 and Dn 7:13, both classic passages of vindication. Jesus understood them to speak of a coming to God in ascent and vindication. The two predictions of "sitting at the right hand of God" and "coming on the clouds of heaven" are to be understood as parallel expressions, static and dynamic, for the same conviction. "Jesus is not at this point speaking of a coming from God: in whatever other sayings he may refer to the coming of the Son of man in visitation, here at any rate he is affirming his vindication" (ibid 45).

Robinson finds this conclusion strengthened by the fact that in the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke a qualifying phrase ("from now on," Mt 26:64; Lk 22:69) is found. In his opinion this leaves no doubt that what they were describing was to take place "from this moment," and he argues that this phrase must originally have been in Mark as well (ibid 45).

We have here, Robinson asserts, a saying not of visitation from

God but of vindication to God. According to an earlier tradition Jesus pictured himself as occupying the Old Testament role of the figure who stood at the judgment before the throne of God to accuse or to plead for those he represented. But the general position of the Church was that by virtue of the resurrection Jesus was himself designated judge on God's behalf, and in the later strands of the gospel tradition he occupied the throne of judgment itself. "And, in this capacity as judge, it is natural that he should also be represented as 'coming' (as, again, in Mt 25:31); for in the biblical tradition God regularly 'comes' to judge the world" (ibid 55).

According to Robinson there was in Jesus' teaching no "coming of the son of man" which did not refer to his ministry, its climax and its consequences. But while these consequences extended far into the future, they remained only consequences, following from the fully inaugurated messianic kingdom, God's decisive saving act. And especially was there no need for a second "coming of the son of man."

Judgment for men and vindication for Jesus would be set in motion by the climax of his ministry, but these were to be effected "from now on." It is for this reason that inaugurated is preferable to realized eschatology, for the kingdom that at the end of the world would either save or condemn men had arrived in history. Yet the son of man would be coming until the kingdom was fully established, until God's saving purpose was fully consummated.

Jesus' messianic act would not be exhausted in his death and resurrection, which would but initiate that reign of God in which henceforth the Father's redeeming work could be brought to

fulfillment. "But what fails is the evidence that Jesus thought of the messianic act as taking place in two stages, the first of which was now shortly to be accomplished, the second of which would follow after an interval and must in the meantime be the focus of every eye and thought" (ibid 82).

But how and why the parousia expectation arose is where Robinson makes his most original proposals. He carefully isolates the parousia hope in order to eliminate it, and makes a distinction between the definitive messianic act—the coming of the son of man—and the final day of the Lord. Between the two lies an interval which was the outworking of the judgment and vindication set in motion by the ministry of Jesus, and its climax. But the outworking and consummation were the consequences of the definitive act and not separate stages. As Robinson says there is no evidence that Jesus thought of the messianic act as taking place in two stages, "the first of which was now shortly to be accomplished, the second of which would follow after an interval and must in the meantime be the focus of every eye and thought" (ibid 81).

Robinson cannot accept Kümmel's interpretation of Mk 9:1 that Jesus expected the definitive coming of the kingdom sometime after his death and resurrection, but within the lifetime of his contemporaries. For Robinson the death and resurrection were the definitive acts, even though some New Testament texts spoke of a second stage in the messianic act, of which the parousia was the main element. But this kind of futurist eschatology, says Robinson, was usually the result of reinterpretation. At first the Church was without a parousia hope, as evidenced by the twenty year silence after the resurrection. Then the parousia hope



emerged and eschatological sayings that already had been realized were reapplied to the new expectation.

Mark 9:1 and similar passages, according to Robinson, underwent a type of reinterpretation that he terms the temporal twist. This phenomenon is wonderful to behold and it is hoped that a permanent place will be found for the concept in biblical scholarship.

Behind the passages in question, Robinson argues, there must be "an original connection of some kind between 'the coming of the son of man' and 'this generation'" (ibid 84). A selection of son of man texts (Mt 11:16-19; Lk 11:30; 17:24; Mk 8:38) reveals that the coming of the son of man was persistently related to the crisis of the present generation. This relationship was also true concerning the beatitudes and maledictions. Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and pharisees made it clear that the Jewish persecution of his followers was unique, a culmination leading to catastrophe that would visit on its victims the weight of all the crimes of the past. This persecution would be unlike any other because it would occur in a new context, the messianic age.

It was this kind of affirmation, says Robinson, that was subject to the temporal twist, turning it into a *terminus ad quem*—a time limit within which certain future events would take place. He cites three texts to illustrate this transformation. In Lk 11:50-51 there is the declaration "that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world . . . shall be required of this generation." In the passage from Mt 23 concerning the woes Jesus describes the way the pharisees would persecute his followers, and concludes: "Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this

generation." The phrase started to become a *terminus ad quem*, a time limit within which certain future events will occur. "And this process is simply completed in Mk 13:30: 'Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away, before all these things take place.' Here it has a purely chronological significance, fixing the extreme limit of a carefully graduated apocalyptic program" (ibid 85-86).

How purely temporal the chronological phrase became is brought out two verses later in Mk 13:32, where "day" and "hour" are brought into the same timetable: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father." Robinson notes that "by itself, and with no prior allusion to 'this generation,' the phrase 'that day' or 'that hour' would naturally refer, as it regularly does (e.g. Mt 7:22; Lk 10:12), to the one day which required no further specification, and which was by its very nature 'known (only) to the Lord' (Za 14:7; cf. II Bar 21:8), because it was his alone to dispose (Acts 1:7)" (ibid 86).

Statements such as "this is the day of salvation" or "this generation shall be judged" were concerned with the decisive moment of which they spoke, not with its duration in terms of hours or years. But when the temporal twist was executed "this is the day" easily became "this day, or this generation will not have passed before the decisive thing happens."

This shift of emphasis, Robinson believes, was to prove one of the most potent factors in attributing to Jesus a concern with a second event lying beyond his own ministry. Jesus' teachings were focused not upon his appearance in the world and its importance but upon a second coming and its imminence. "This

generation,' from designating, in terms of the moral crisis, the moment during which the end and its judgment are set within the present, comes to describe, in purely chronological terms, the span of time still left before the end, within which all must be fulfilled" (ibid 89).

The change that the teachings of Jesus underwent as a result of the temporal twist can be compared to the change that occurred in the Old Testament during the transition from the eschatology of the prophets to that of the apocalyptic writers.

For the prophets eschatology was a way of understanding the history in which they were living *sub specie finis*—in the light of the ultimate meaning and judgment of God. "They were concerned with the end, not for providing a map of the future, but for supplying a criterion for the present" (ibid 94). With the apocalyptists on the other hand eschatology developed into a science of the end—a description of what was going to happen hereafter, whether in history or beyond it. The prophet dealt with events which were "entirely predictable from current trends (as, for instance, was the fall of Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah), and after them other events can be expected to occur without a break" (ibid 96). But the apocalyptist dealt with occurrences which did not have their origin within this order of events at all. They were inserted into history from without, by the sovereign power of God, and were to be the conclusion of history. Life in the age to come was entirely discontinuous with life in this one.

Like Kümmel, Robinson thinks that the eschatological discourses in the synoptic gospels originally referred to the destruction of Jerusalem. As a result of the temporal twist and apocalyptic reinterpretation they were made to refer to the parousia as

well. Thus Mk 13:5-20 can be interpreted most satisfactorily concerning the eventual destruction of Jerusalem.

Unlike Kümmel, Robinson believes in an "originally indivisible experience" embracing resurrection, ascension and parousia—the latter of course in something other than the proper sense. With the exception of Acts 1:1-11, there is no trace in the New Testament of an interval between resurrection and ascension. "Even in Acts 1:1-11, Père Benoit has argued, the departure of Jesus from the disciples' sight is not depicted by Luke as the real moment of his glorification." The ascension story marks "the final withdrawal of the Christ who has already been exalted to the Father's side but who has returned for a limited period to show himself to his disciples" (ibid 134-135).

In the same way, Robinson believes, there was no original interval between the exaltation of Jesus and his parousia. Again the difference was not one of temporal sequence but of theological emphasis. The exaltation (resurrection) fixed attention upon the crowning of the previous humiliation. The parousia fixed attention on the release thenceforward of the sovereignty thus inaugurated. The parousia showed the son of man not only seated at the right hand of God, but coming in his power.

The notion of a double advent, and specifically the two comings of one and the same Christ, has been clearly delineated by Robinson, and it is precisely this notion that he finds no precedent for in Jewish eschatology. Some of the early Christians looked for a direct intervention of God in the end time, while others expected the appearance of some messianic figure; still others combined these two ideas and awaited a coming of the Christ

followed by a final advent of God. That there was an interval between these two comings was again an idea that had roots in Judaism. The Dead Sea essenes even expected two messiahs, one royal and the other priestly. But it is the two comings of the one messiah that cries out for explanation.

The explanation, says Robinson, "is to be sought in an unresolved crisis in the christology of the primitive Church, centering in the problem whether or not the messianic event had yet taken place, whether the Christ had come or not. The solution, as so often, was a compromise: part of it had taken place and part of it had not, the Christ had come and yet would come. Hence the idea of the messianic drama in two acts separated by an interval" (ibid 142).

Although Robinson finds no reference to the parousia in the early sermons of Acts, in Acts 2 he discovers the most complete statement of his fully inaugurated eschatology, "the established gospel of the primitive Church."

But Acts 3, Peter's second sermon, is something completely different. After sketching the story of Jesus, Peter urged his hearers to repent and have faith, "that your sins may be wiped out and that so the Lord may send the times of refreshment, and that he may send the Christ destined beforehand for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time of universal restoration comes."

Not only does Robinson see no parousia here, he also discerns hesitation as to whether or not the decisive messianic act had taken place at all. Even in his exaltation, "Jesus is still only the Christ-elect; the messianic age has yet to be inaugurated. If we put the question, 'Art thou "he that should come," or are we to

look for another?,' the answer given here is: 'Yes, Jesus is the one who shall come.' We know who the Messiah will be; there is no need to look for another. The Messiah, to be sure, is still to come. But Jesus has already been sent, as the forerunner of the Christ he is to be" (ibid 144-145).

In relation to the more integral doctrine the position of Acts 2 represents an intermediate stage. By his resurrection Jesus was merely designated what eternally he was. Progressively his divinity was also affirmed for the time of his humiliation, the whole of his public life, and finally his preexistence. In Robinson's opinion Acts 3 represented a still more primitive stage, in which Jesus was not yet the Christ even at the resurrection; the messianic event was still awaited (ibid 147).

Fully inaugurated eschatology defends a definitive and essentially complete messianic realization in the climax of the ministry of Jesus, namely the resurrection. Everything in the plan of salvation that followed, including the final consummation, was a consequence of that definitive act. For Jesus this resurrection was the event through which God was to initiate the new covenant and introduce the messianic age. Jesus looked to a final consummation in which he would share. But in Robinson's opinion he did not look to a second act in history after an interval, a "part two" of his coming whereby he would incorporate elements not introduced by the first (ibid 151). Specifically he did not look for a parousia, a second coming.

The parousia hope arose from doubt and hesitation as to whether the resurrection could fully be called the definitive messianic, eschatological event—the event that would introduce the

day when the world would be saved and judged. That there should be a "last day," a "day of consummation" was not doubted. "The hesitation was whether, within history, everything had now been inaugurated which that day would crown, or whether there were elements yet to enter it, another 'coming' before which the *consummatum* could not be declared" (ibid 151). This "within history" was significant for, to Robinson's mind, it indicated that while the definitive act was within history the consummation was not.

Jesus had presented himself primarily as the suffering servant of the Lord. But what of all the other aspects of the promised messianic rule which apparently found no fulfillment in Jesus under this title? These aspects, says Robinson, were eventually applied to the merging hope of a second coming and thus Christian apocalypse was constructed. "As in the Old Testament, unfulfilled prophecy was to prove the father of apocalyptic: features in the traditional picture of God's coming to reign, combined with those in Jesus' own teaching which did not yet appear to have been accounted for, materialized into a second, mythological event still to be awaited" (ibid 151). The first definitive act was "within history," the second coming was a "mythological event."

Coming to an end of our study of Robinson's eschatology, we cannot help but revert to a clear cut statement he makes early in his *Jesus and His Coming*. He says: "It would be impossible simply to be content with the expectation of the New Testament Church, if at this point it could be maintained that it had seriously misconceived the expectation of Jesus. For if the Church represented Jesus as promising to return when he himself gave no

such promise, clearly the foundation of the credal clause and of the whole Christian hope would be imperiled" (12).

How do Robinson's findings conform to this standard? The parousia hope, he says, arose from hesitation as to whether Jesus had fully come as the Christ; but if this were the only line of hope in the New Testament, then the early Christians had seriously misconceived Jesus' own expectation and the entire Christian hope was imperiled.

Robinson perceives two lines of hope in the New Testament: the hesitation or parousia line, which incorporates a good deal of the apocalyptic; and a fully inaugurated eschatology. He identifies fully inaugurated eschatology with Jesus' own expectation, and from thereon sees it as a continuous line running through the primitive preaching, Acts 2, the early synoptics, the epistle to the Hebrews and the gospel of John. In this line there was a hope not for another coming but for the reduction of all things to Christ.

Robinson conjectures that the tradition behind inaugurated eschatology entered Christianity through the influence of John the Baptist and indirectly, therefore, through the practices of the Qumran community. The tradition probably did not venture far from its cradle in Judea until the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, when it removed to Ephesus. On the other hand, there is some evidence in Judaism for associating the apocalyptic tradition with Galilee and the north. It may even have established itself in the Christian community at Antioch.

"It was this Church from which Paul worked as a missionary during his 'apocalyptic' period, and whose theology, if B. H. Streeter is right (*The Four Gospels*, 500-23), was later incorpo-



rated in the gospel of Matthew. . . . It is interesting to observe that the Pauline and Johannine traditions come closest to meeting in two documents (not, I believe, so very distant in date of composition) which subsequent tradition associates with Ephesus, the epistle to the Ephesians and the gospel of John. The last state of the Pauline tradition has affinities with the earliest of the Johannine, just as the earliest elements in Paul correspond to the latest, editorial elements in Matthew" (ibid 164-165).

But the two traditions were not completely divergent or mutually incompatible. Thus the parousia strain is not altogether lacking in Hebrews and John, while in Paul there is a transition from one to the other. Even Matthew's gospel ends with words of the exalted Christ which express the theme of an eschatology fully inaugurated from the resurrection onward.

Far from being a corrective, John's gospel sets forth a tradition of Jesus' teaching that never seriously underwent a tendency toward apocalypse. "The value of John's presentation," says Robinson, "lies in the fact that with unique penetration he brings into creative unity elements in the common tradition which elsewhere tend to fall apart and thus become distorted." And in the same context he adds: "Now, there are three points at least at which the fourth gospel holds together elements never fully integrated in other parts of the New Testament" (ibid 165).

The conjunction of "creative unity" and "holding together" is worth noting for they indicate two quite separate things. Later Robinson refers to Jn 16:32 ("The hour is coming—it has come—when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone") as a saying which will "bring together two moments

which in the Synoptists are separate, as indeed in temporal sequence they were" (ibid 174).

If however the line of fully inaugurated eschatology represented Jesus' own expectation, to what extent was it a holding together and to what extent a bringing together? Robinson believes that "there are three points at least at which the fourth gospel holds together elements never fully integrated in other parts of the New Testament" (ibid 165). Without a doubt John affords us many comprehensive views. But in how many instances is this done by bringing together "events separate in temporal sequence?" And were the elements never fully integrated in other parts of the New Testament because they were temporally distinct?

Robinson posits that the fourth gospel "comprehends within a single and massive theological whole all the different facets of the act of God in Christ" (ibid 165). As in primitive preaching, John made no distinction between the resurrection and the ascension—the giving of the Spirit was closely linked to the exaltation of Jesus, and hope for the future was based on his Lordship inaugurated at the resurrection. "There is an unequivocal assertion that the climax of the ministry itself in the exaltation of Jesus out of death is the decisive event upon which everything turns" (ibid 138). In this regard John went beyond the primitive preaching and included even the cross in Jesus' exaltation.

Moreover, as in the primitive preaching, John held together the "now" and the "not yet" by means of "from now on." There was future expectation in inaugurated eschatology; everything was inaugurated, but only inaugurated. The resurrection was the judgment of the world and yet the world had still to be judged.

John also had a concern for the future, and it is noteworthy

that there are more sayings about the future in John than there are in Mark. The last discourses in John performed the same function as the synoptic apocalypses, but in John the classic themes of apocalypse were "linked not with a second supernatural event but with the single historical crisis of the death and resurrection of Jesus" (ibid 173). What was for Jesus a coming from the moment of his resurrection onward became dissociated from the paschal events altogether in the parousia hope. In John the parousia remained what it was originally, not as a "separate catastrophic occurrence, but as a continuous pervasion of the daily life of the disciple and the Church" (ibid 175).

Finally, Robinson says, John held together the two ideas of vindication and visitation, of ascent to God and descent from God—a unity constantly imperiled in the rest of the tradition. In John it is not merely that the manner of two separate events will be the same; they are the same event. The resurrection, which inaugurated the parousia, is an event looked at from two points of view, of coming to the Father in vindication and coming from the Father in power. The parousia line of hope was a mistake, says Robinson, because it took as a literal event what was actually a myth. The parousia idea itself, representing in dramatic terms a vivid and profound picture of the summing up of all things in Christ, was not unacceptable. The mistake arose when this myth was taken for a literal, historical event (ibid 180-181).

Moreover, Robinson affirms, the fall and the parousia both belong to the realm of myth. And either myth loses its value when it is made to "describe not what is now and persistently true, whether forwards or backwards, but a datable event, whether

near or remote" (ibid 182). The parousia became a distortion when it no longer served as a symbol but as an event, and in the apocalyptic tradition it was considered an event. All things considered then Robinson's view of the "not yet" does not differ notably from Dodd's.

For the precritical theologian and the modern fundamentalist, we noted previously, the formulation of the Christian doctrine of the last things is a matter of assembling texts, regarded as predictions, and arranging them into a coherent map of the end. The more recent trend, on the other hand, holds that "the true character of the biblical statements about the end of the world, as about its beginning, is not that of literal history but of myth" (ibid 10). The various elements of the end picture are expressed as events but they are not to be viewed as literal occurrences. Concerning this procedure, Robinson opines that: "Since Christianity is not a system of ideas, but an interpretation of history, no sound or lasting foundation of Christian doctrine can be erected on such evasion" (ibid 10).

In his *An Introduction to the New Testament*<sup>1</sup> Richard Heard says that, in the face of evidence, "it must either be accepted that Jesus is rightly recorded in the synoptic gospels as having taught of his early return in glory and the accompanying judgment—and that he was mistaken, or it must be shown that his teaching was from the earliest days misinterpreted and transformed. There are strong reasons for rejecting the former alternative, and accepting the challenge of the latter" (247). This is a challenge that so far Robinson has not effectively met.

## Prophetic Eschatology

THE various systems of eschatology that we have studied thus far were hammered out only with great effort, and each springs from a sincere desire to grasp the nature of Jesus' eschatological message. By their give and take they have managed both to lay bare the nature and disposition of the scriptural material and to suggest the possible interpretations. To a large degree they correct one another and eliminate the excesses in earlier interpretation.

Now we will examine the conclusions of a still more recent study of eschatology—Graham Neville's *The Advent Hope*.<sup>1</sup> This review is especially in order because in a sense Neville brings us, full cycle, back to the precritical contentions in that he restores a practically unimpaired parousia to eschatology.

Neville is as skeptical of apocalypse as any of his forerunners. In a study of the fourth gospel Robinson says that the "path into apocalyptic was a *faux pas*."<sup>2</sup> *The Advent Hope* might be styled a help-stamp-out-apocalyptic. One of Neville's beliefs is that "a healthy theology ought to be as self-consistent as possible" (ibid 104). And to be consistent, Neville insists, we must decide whether Jesus belonged to the prophetic or the apocalyptic school, for intrusions of apocalyptic into the prophetic cast of thought are perversions.

Prophetic eschatology, according to Neville, has three essential characteristics—its corporateness, its moral conditioning and its positive interpretation of history (ibid 89). Corporate, prophetic eschatology concerns itself with the destiny of God's people rather than with the destiny of particular individuals. Historically positive it gives a positive interpretation of history, viewing history as the continuum of divine action. Normally conditioned it shows that the course of events is influenced by free, responsible human acts. "The hope of apocalyptic is not ethically conditioned, nor concerned with history, nor centered upon a visible community. It is the hope of God's capricious action, negating all antecedent historical development and gathering a number of elect individuals into a better age" (ibid 31).

In the prophetic understanding of history God's concern was primarily with Israel as a single entity; for the apocalyptic writers the primary datum was the individual and the primary concern was the individual's ultimate fate. Compared with prophecy, apocalypse lacked a certain kind of hope—morally conditioned hope—and history's realization would be only through the aided and predetermined action of God. The apocalypticist is not concerned with preparing the way of the Lord but only with calculating the time of his arrival. But the prophets saw in history the working out of the divine will, not in spite of the free action of men and nations, but through them (ibid 29).

In distinguishing prophetic from apocalyptic we can apply certain touchstones, of which the handiest is whether or not the writer regards the end as datable. If he does he is committed, Neville asserts, to a deterministic outlook. He cannot believe that eschatology is controlled by man's free response to God's de-

mands, and his attention must turn from mankind and the people of Israel to the individual, since the only open question is the individual's fate at the judgment (ibid 39). In Neville's opinion Jesus belonged entirely to the prophetic school.

Having established Jesus in the prophetic tradition, Neville then argues that his eschatology must have followed the pattern found in that tradition. And the prophetic books, says Neville, had two horizons: one very close at hand, the other lying beyond. The prophets were concerned with the immediate and the ultimate, but with what laid between they were not concerned.

The prophets combined a passionate concern about the present and the immediate future—their primary theme—with a concern about the end. That end might be expressed in this worldly terms or in terms which were other worldly, but an end of some kind there would be, in the sense of a state of affairs beyond which no further development was conceivable.

Moreover the prophets received a revelation concerning the actualities of their times. Because this revelation gave them a vivid insight into the ways of God, it was possible for them to make a confident statement about the ultimate goal of history. It did not however enable them to map the distant future. The message of the prophets was contained in "prophecies treating of current affairs followed by prophecies about the end with no more link than some vague phrase such as 'in those days' or 'afterward'" (ibid 39).

Having argued that Jesus was strictly a prophet, Neville then assumes that we should expect to find in Jesus' picture of the fu-

ture the same two horizons, a foreground and a background. The foreground will be made up of immediate expectations arising from his prophetic judgment upon his own generation, while the background will be concerned with ultimate events belonging to the eschaton. In the prophetic tradition "we find a prophetic outlook on the future developing from a single concern with immediate events and their outcome to a double concern with proximate and final events, the two being linked by the self-consistency of God and the Lord of history and not in datal terms" (ibid 57).

Since Jesus could not have predicted the future, the only connection between the immediate and the ultimate was that which was created by the self-consistency of God. The lesson that the prophets taught most clearly was that the present and the end are part and parcel of each other. Since they were able to discern God's hand at work in the present, the prophets could look from the present to the end and express themselves with certainty concerning the kind of end it would be, since both present and end were controlled by the nature of God, who was ever the same (ibid 105-106).

Leaving aside the perversions introduced by apocalyptic reinterpretation, according to Neville, the eschatology of Jesus falls entirely within the prophetic pattern. Mark 13 cannot rightly be described as apocalyptic for it has that double horizon which the nature of prophetic vision demands. Moreover, the three facets of prophetic hope are discernible in the teaching of Jesus as a whole (ibid 45-50).

But the apocalyptic expectations interjected into the gospels by the Church were not a creation *ex nihilo*; Jesus' teaching con-



tained elements that could have given rise to such expectations. All of his teaching was eschatological. Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom in himself and a still more manifest coming of the kingdom for the future. "History still had a meaning and a direction, and within that future life of the Kingdom it was given to Jesus to reveal certain significant moments" (ibid 58).

The first and greatest of these moments was his own sacrificial death, which would cause the kingdom to spring into visible life. The kingdom was the second moment. The life of the messianic community however would have to repeat the experience of its Lord in suffering. The third significant moment in the history of the kingdom would be a period of suffering and persecution which the kingdom would survive. And the final moment in this drama of the last things was to be the coming of the son of man with power and glory, "the end to which the whole creation moved, undatable, indescribable except in symbols, yet assured by the faithfulness of him without whom not a sparrow could fall to the ground" (ibid 59).

The coming of the kingdom was a movement in three phases: the coming of the historical Jesus, the release of power through his death, and full realization at the last day. Within the collected sayings of Jesus were to be found some referring to each of these phases, but only the last of these remained in the future for the Church when the gospels were being written, and this determined the direction of her reinterpretation. As the eschatological expectation sharpened under the stress of suffering and persecution, the expositors of Jesus' teaching reapplied those words of the Lord which originally referred to either the first or the second phase in the eschatological drama to the third (ibid 60).

Thus the crises parables were reapplied from the first phase to the third. Matthew's and Luke's treatment of Mk 13 show reapplication from the second to the third, and in the course of reapplication there were inevitably slight verbal adjustments.

For Neville, Mk 13 originally was not apocalyptic. Rather it contains the two horizons, the immediate (13:5-23) and the ultimate (13:24-27), which he considers characteristic of prophetic eschatology. Compared to Matthew's version of the discourse the most obvious difference is that Matthew adds the word "immediately" to the beginning of the second main section of the discourse (v 29), thus bringing the events of the parousia into direct connection with the time of tribulation. "With one word he has destroyed the structure of the original discourse" (*ibid* 53).

By this and other small changes the original discourse consisting of two discontinuous sections was welded into a single continuous discourse. The first section of the discourse (13:5-23) which originally was limited to the immediate horizon was made to refer to the ultimate horizon—to the coming of Christ and to the end. In this way a program for the future was produced and the parousia, which is undatable according to Neville's definition of prophecy, was given at least an approximate date immediately after the period of intense suffering.

But there are other passages in the New Testament that emphasize the two remaining phases of Jesus' eschatology. While pointing out the differences in emphasis of Acts 2 and Acts 3 (like Robinson), Neville concludes that though the parousia was an integral part of the early Christian preaching, as represented in Acts, "an effective gospel could yet be presented without any great emphasis upon the parousia" (*ibid* 91). This presentation of the gospel was understandable and effective in the early days

of the Church when the presence of the Spirit was experienced so vividly. It was not however a complete gospel.

Neville finds it altogether natural that in the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles should preach a realized eschatology, with nearly all the emphasis being placed on the first two of the three phases of Jesus' eschatology. In John too "the emphasis falls upon that which is present in Jesus as he lives among men and that which is given through the Spirit after his death and departure. Indeed, we may detect a firm intention to redirect the Church's concern from the ultimate parousia to the life which is already given through the Spirit" (ibid 93).

Looking back over the ground he and other writers in the field of eschatology have covered, Neville concludes that neither a realized nor an adventist eschatology is acceptable. "The former is too little inclined to make the leap from the present to the end, and too little aware of the subjection of the present to the judgment of God" (ibid 102-103). An adventist eschatology, since it is basically apocalyptic, is foreign to the genuine prophetic tradition of sacred scripture and leads to determinism and individualism.

Furthermore either eschatology carries with it a view about the appropriate nature of the Church. Adventism leads to the conviction that, confronted by an immediately impending judgment, there is only one thing the Church can hope to achieve: the repentance of individual men and women through the urgent proclamation of the gospel of redemption.

In realized eschatology the Church's task becomes the proclamation of a present reality—the kingdom at work among men.

#### PROPHETIC ESCHATOLOGY

The priest becomes "the focus of its corporate life and its accredited representative in all official actions," and its "most characteristic topic is that of the sacraments, since in them the interpenetration of the two orders of existence (the essential tenet of realized eschatology) is most clearly demonstrated" (ibid 110).

Noting that in the last century there has been a shift from the adventist to realized eschatology, Neville remarks that "this has coincided with a remarkable increase in the appeal of the Roman Catholic Church in England" (ibid 111).

## Quest for a Theology

THE last hundred years has witnessed first a disintegration and then a resurgence of biblical theology. The disintegration began when classical criticism destroyed the unity and the distinctiveness of the bible. There was no possibility of a theology as long as the prophets were set up in opposition to the law, and the Old Testament utterly separated from the New.

Now however classical criticism is just another historical phase in biblical criticism. The unity of the bible and the distinctiveness of Israel's faith have been vindicated—points that H. H. Rowley makes with force and clarity in his *Unity of the Bible*.<sup>1</sup> And not only is a biblical theology possible but a desire for one is vividly felt. In the biblical revival we are experiencing in the Church in our time, it is not merely erudition, cultural formation or apologetic defense of the bible's truth that is being sought, says R. A. F. MacKenzie S.J. "It is theology—for theology is nothing but *fides quaerens intellectum*, and that is precisely what the biblical revival of our day consists in. It is doctrine that is sought, the message contained in this mysterious and fascinating book, the revelation, in short, as it is expressed in the inspired words, preserved and presented and interpreted to us by the Church."<sup>2</sup> He defines this biblical theology as the "doctrine of God contained in Scripture, analyzed and systematized in biblical categories."<sup>3</sup>

At a time when real progress is being made in so many aspects of biblical theology, we can expect that progress will be made in the field of eschatology as well. And the situation is by no means a discouraging one, although the canvas here is immensely larger than it was, for example, in the case of the beatitudes. As we noted previously Robinson remarks that "if the apocalypse of Thessalonians provides no hints of the development which went before it, that in the Gospels would appear to have left so many that almost every investigator can arrive at a different reconstruction" (op cit 118).

It may be that biblical scholarship will never be able to delineate original and reinterpretation as incisively in the study of eschatology as has been done in the case of the beatitudes. And when it turns out, as it must, that many questions will have to go unanswered, we should be equipped to understand the reason for this failure. Admitting that his *Christ and Time* does not solve many questions that the systematic theologian must raise, Cullmann goes on to ask: "Is it not the most valuable service that the New Testament scholar can render to the systematic theologian that he permits the questions that are not solved in the New Testament itself to stand as questions? And does not the real responsibility of the exegete in relation to systematic theology lie precisely in this limitation, so that his duty is to hand on these questions in the very form in which they are presented by the objective New Testament data?" (15-16).

Side by side with this thesis is the dictum of Jean Levie S.J.: "We may rightly be astonished at the confidence and speed with which certain exegetes or theologians of earlier times used to pick out this or that theological truth as formally taught by the inspired writers."<sup>4</sup>

*Lines of Development*

Several lines of development toward a theology of eschatology suggest themselves. One is further study of Jesus' use of apocalyptic, even though eschatology has been dominated by an anti-apocalyptic attitude from Dodd on. In reaction to liberal criticism Schweitzer emphasized, perhaps overemphasized the apocalyptic passages of the gospels, and eschatological studies have been in reaction to his position ever since. This reaction is especially noticeable in Neville, since in other respects he maintains so orthodox a position.

Neville found apocalyptic to be characterized by determinism, individualism and historical negativism, and he considers its outlook to be foreign to the authentic doctrine of the scriptures. But the book of Daniel did get into the canon and the shorter canon at that, and it is clear that Jesus and his Church adopted important concepts from this and similar writings. Furthermore Rowley in his *Relevance of the Apocalyptic*<sup>5</sup> offers a number of considerations which hint that the difference between prophetic and apocalyptic is not as great as Neville suggests.

In the circles that produced the apocalyptic writings, Rowley points out, little importance was attached to those details on which the schemes of adventist interpreters are commonly built. There was the greatest variety in the conception of the expected events, both in separate works and even within single works. The apocalyptic author had "no desire to pin himself down to details" (op cit 9). When we approach their writings in the same spirit, "we are able to concentrate on the broad features of the hope of these writers, and on the spiritual principles that underlie their

work. We are able to realize that a truly prophetic purpose inspired them" (ibid 9).

Rowley insists that it was of the essence of prophecy to use prediction, and that it used prediction not primarily for the sake of unfolding the future but to bring home the message of God to the men who first received it. Basically, the apocalyptists did the same thing, but their methods differed because their audiences' circumstances were different. Apocalypse "is essentially the readaption of the ideas and aspirations of earlier days to a new situation" (ibid 13).

Both prophets and apocalyptists were men who spoke to their own generation. In their time the prophets had to stir the people up to loyalty to the covenant. Apocalypse on the other hand was written to strengthen and encourage people who were being martyred because of their very loyalty. The apocalyptist had an essentially practical purpose—to proclaim hope to men in the midst of tribulation and persecution and to call them to loyalty and watchfulness.

In the hands of the apocalyptists the concept of a great world judgment was given increased prominence and definiteness, and it was placed in a setting in history. Judgment was about to be passed, the sentence executed and the golden age was about to burst in its glory. Generally speaking the prophets viewed the events and policies of their day with penetrating eye and perceived their inevitable outcome. They foretold the future that should arise out of the present, "while the apocalyptists foretold the future that should break into the present" (ibid 35).

We find all these characteristics in the book of Daniel, the first great apocalypse. Later apocalyptists were to take it up and read it



primarily as a prediction of the end, whereas it was primarily a word of encouragement and consolation for men in dire need. Thus apocalypse contained a recurring idea that history could be divided into a number of periods or ages (four, seven, ten, twelve) whose number was predetermined. Behind this concept lay the belief and vivid assertion that God was in control of history.

Yet Rowley sees here none of the determinism that is of so much concern to Neville. The apocalyptists, like the prophets before them, "were able to hold within the unity of a single idea the certainty that men and nations were themselves responsible for their acts, and the certainty that without their knowing it they were serving divine purposes" (ibid 152).

Again, apocalypse seems to have reserved the divine intervention for the final act of history, but this impression is more apparent than real. While their supreme interest was in the final act, they did not deny the hand of God in all history, for they certainly did not repudiate the teaching of the prophets.

The apocalyptists looked for a unique divine initiative at the end of history, an act as solely God's own as his act of creation had been. They did not emphasize the divine hand in all of history lest they should obscure the uniqueness of this expected act of God. And surely there was nothing unreasonable in this faith, for the course of history must come to an end. The end of history must witness the realization of the divine goal, and it must appear as God's goal, for it has been his from the beginning.

The apocalyptist expected the end to be preceded by a time of unprecedented suffering. As a rule he lived in evil times and

"believed it to be the final fling of evil" (ibid 156). He depicted the conditions and events of his day in a cosmic setting. Convinced of their universal significance, he described them as accompanied by supernatural signs which revealed their importance. For him the suffering he experienced was part of God's struggle with the power of evil.

This conviction was fundamentally true for it was Beliar, the power of evil in all its incarnations, who brought sorrow and disaster to the world. Therefore all who suffered persecution out of loyalty to God and in resistance to evil were doing something of vast significance. That is to say, their suffering linked them with the eternal will and purpose of God.

If we examine the whole corpus of apocalyptic writings we get the impression that apocalyptists expected an immediate coming of the kingdom. And since these writings are clustered about the establishment of the kingdom of Jesus it would appear that their instinct was right. In any case, so far as scriptural inerrancy is concerned, we need deal only with the apocalyptic in the canonical writings. No expectancy in the Old Testament is quite so sharp as that expressed by Paul in Thessalonians and it is no insoluble problem.<sup>6</sup>

In his article on the "Life and Teaching of Jesus" in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*<sup>7</sup> J. W. Bowman stresses the varied cultural contacts Jesus was likely to have had. In addition to having learned the classical Hebrew of the Old Testament scriptures, Jesus also knew enough rabbinical Hebrew to meet the rabbis on their own ground; and both his friends and enemies at times addressed him as Rabbi. Aramaic was Jesus' native tongue but he

may well have had an elementary knowledge of hellenistic Greek and a smattering of Latin as well. Moreover, his native Galilee was the crossroads of the world, in a sense, for one of the great highways connecting east and west ran close by Nazareth. There Jesus could see the whole world go by.

Compared with Jerusalem and Judea, the centers of rabbinical learning, Galilee lacked sophistication, to be sure. By and large, says Bowman, the small land owners and artisans and traders of Galilee were either Hasidim (truly religious, nonsectarian Jews) or Zealots (members of the nationalistic, liberation party). Both groups were looked upon with scorn by the more important people as religiously illiterate "people of the land." "Our Lord's family and the majority of his disciples undoubtedly were drawn from this group (Acts 4:13)" (ibid 734).

It is possible that Jesus also came in contact with the essenes who were to be found throughout Palestine, and through the influence of this sect came in contact with apocalyptic literature. "For it does seem that this literature had a greater vogue among the less sophisticated Galileans than in Judea" (ibid 734). The Qumran community and its adherents regarded themselves as the eschatological community living in the end time and they treasured all apocalyptic literature.

"It is an undoubted fact that the Church to which we owe our Gospels was an apocalyptic Church, believing in the series of ideas about which we have just been speaking. It is not strange, therefore, that these Gospels should reflect such beliefs" (ibid 734). Thoroughgoing eschatology of course over-emphasizes apocalyptic by saying that all of Jesus' teaching is to be understood from this precept. We find similarities between Jesus' teach-

ings and those of several other groups or movements—pharisee, essene, apocalyptic, even sadducee. Yet Jesus' teaching was altogether distinctive. Like any wise teacher Jesus used the thought-frames and idioms with which his hearers were familiar to present his distinctive message.

Rowley writes: "That Jesus accepted much of the apocalyptic thought seems to me hardly to be denied. But with it he combined much else" (*Relevance* 177). The very idea of the kingdom of God, so central to Jesus' thought, came from the apocalypticists, and the same can be said of the concepts of life beyond the grave and angelology.

Rowley rejects the idea that at the core of the gospel apocalypse was an apocalypse which originally had a separate existence (*ibid* 145-147). He quotes with approval an observation of Dodd's that a critical analysis of the gospels suggests that during the formation of the tradition it was just the eschatological elements in it that suffered most expansion and development. At the same time he asserts that the gospel apocalypse contains genuine utterances of Jesus, though they were not necessarily spoken on a single occasion.

Regarding the parousia proper, Rowley finds his view very similar to that of Oscar Cullmann, as formulated in *The Return of Christ* (1944) and other works. "Here it is argued that while any attempt to date the second advent is futile and wrong, the hope of that advent is integral to New Testament thought. It is not something that can be dropped without affecting anything but itself, but something that is directly related to the message of the cross and the resurrection. To Greek thought, with its cyclic

conception of time, it is alien, but to the Hebraic and Christian conception of time, which is linear, it is closely related. The Kingdom of God is not merely something supra-terrestrial, but something that is to be realized on earth as the crown and climax of the redemption that stands between creation and this recreation of heaven and earth. And therefore Christ will return to earth" (Rowley, op cit 148).

### *Time and Eternity*

A second line of development in eschatological interpretation suggests itself, namely the key concepts in the theology of Oscar Cullmann. These concepts were initially suggested in *The Return of Christ*,<sup>8</sup> developed more fully in *Christ and Time*<sup>9</sup> and more recently subjected to a vigorous bombardment by Professor James Barr in his *Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961) and especially in his *Biblical Words for Time*.<sup>10</sup> If any of Cullmann's concepts have survived it can truly be said that they passed the trial by fire.

In the works in question Cullmann seeks first to establish that there was a distinctive Hebraic-Christian understanding of time, and then he would use this understanding to establish the historical nature of the end and the parousia. Like many other scholars he holds that the Greek and Hebrew concepts of time were basically different. Greek thought had a cyclic conception of time; Hebraic and Christian thought a linear conception of time. "The only time known to the Greeks is cyclic time which returns eternally in an infinite circle. Thus the Greek thinker is unable to conceive that salvation can and must be accomplished in time.

For him salvation always means liberation from time, as escape from the framework of the eternal return of all beings and all things" (*Return* 144).

In Greek thought history was a process of degradation, a fall from a state of innocence on a spiritual, timeless plane to a state of guilt on a material plane that alone had time. According to this point of view, salvation necessarily implied the annihilation of time, to be effected either by ritual myth—which periodically regenerated the cosmos and society by contact with primordial acts of gods and heroes—or by mysticism—the freeing oneself from time in order to be united with the divinity.

For the Greeks then eternity meant a complete absence of time. The bible on the other hand used one word (*aion*) for both time and eternity. Time, from creation to the end, had definite limits but it was open at both ends; eternity was unlimited time.

According to the bible, when God acted, and he acted because he saved, his act was carried out progressively. The bible had a forward look and Israel had hope for the future. Mankind enjoyed a period of innocence and bliss at the opening of history, but the climax and crown of history was in the future. And since Yahweh was the Lord of time and history, the climax would come when his will was fully carried out.<sup>11</sup>

Christianity of course took over this forward look and this linear concept of time, but in so doing introduced an all important change. Between creation and end it introduced the definitive divine act of salvation. The interval or interim period between this saving act and the end was the time of the Church.

The New Testament message of salvation "begins with Creation and ends with the new creation on the last day, which is its goal and end. Between these two moments there is set the decisive event of the cross, which is past history for us but the basis of our salvation. Between these two moments is set all the intermediate time of the Church in which we ourselves are living" (ibid 143).

The Jewish calendar, based on the proposition that it is possible to fix the date of the creation of the world, designates that event by the year 1 and simply numbers forward from that point. "Our system, however, does not proceed from an initial point, but from a center; it takes as the mid-point an event which is open to historical investigation and can be chronologically fixed, if not with complete accuracy, at least within a space of a few years. This event is the birth of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Thence proceed in opposite directions two enumerations, one forward, the other backward: 'after Christ,' 'before Christ'" (*Time* 17).

Thus we are vividly reminded of the inescapable history-centeredness of our salvation and of the essential difference between Jewish and Christian eschatology. For Jewish eschatology the definitive saving act is future; for Christianity the definitive act is past but the end is not yet.

Because Christians number the years both before and after the birth of Christ, the Christ event stands forth as the temporal mid-point of the entire historical process. "The point of departure here, therefore, is not the beginning of the series of happenings. This beginning, according to this enumeration, lies rather at an undetermined point on the line that runs back from the mid-point, just as the end lies at an undetermined point on the line that stretches forward; on both sides the possibility remains open

of unlimited further enumeration" (ibid 18). The important consideration here from our particular point of view is that the period before creation and after the end lies on the same line as the limited time between the two events.

Limited time began with creation. The fall and its consequences made a history of salvation necessary. God began his plan of salvation by electing the people of Israel to be his instrument of salvation. By the two principles of election and substitution, a remnant of this people was elected to represent the whole, and then a unique man, the suffering servant of the Lord, *qui tollit peccata mundi*, was elected, whose death on the cross and resurrection constitute the center of the history of salvation.

Henceforth the process was reversed and the movement was from the one to the many; the Church, the body of Christ, aspired to embrace the whole of humanity. The time of the Church will now be followed by the final act of divine omnipotence, when God, by his divine power alone, as in the first creation, will constitute the new creation. "The Christian expectation of the end, the Christian hope for the future are part of the unfolding of this story, they are situated on the line which, starting from creation and passing through the people of Israel, the remnant, through Christ, the one, through the gospel and converted and ransomed humanity, opens out on the new creation. This line is a temporal line and it is characteristic of the Christian revelation" (*Return* 144).

Christian eschatology is an absolutely chronological concept, and it cannot be conceived as "the expression of 'our per-



manent availability for existential decision'” (Bultmann) (ibid 144). In New Testament thought it was not time and eternity that were in opposition but limited and unlimited time; the latter differed from the former only in that it was not limited. The word used to express eternity (aion) was the same word that was also applied to a limited division of time. This verbal usage shows that primitive Christianity placed both the creation “in the beginning” and the goal of all becoming “at the end of the days” in precisely the same christocentric perspective of biblical history. It viewed these events at either extreme of salvation history in precisely the same temporal Christ-line which it uses to view the other better known events of salvation history.

Why will Jesus come again? Insofar as this question can be answered from the Hebraic time concept, Cullmann answers, Jesus will come again because the salvation line is uniformly temporal and chronological, and because Jesus is the Lord of every phase of that salvation line. Our very way of reckoning years is an acknowledgement that the Christ-event stands at the mid-point of salvation history and that the whole history of salvation is directed toward Christ the Lord. And in considering the formation of the gospel traditions, we saw how the conviction of the lordship of Jesus arose precisely from the resurrection. When it became necessary for the primitive Church to add an account of his public ministry, the fact that Jesus was also Lord during this period was brought out in a number of ways. This process continued until it was asserted for the period covered by the infancy narrative, and reached its inevitable conclusion in the assertion of Jesus' lordship for all time. Thus John asserts in his prologue:

QUEST FOR A THEOLOGY

All things were made through him,  
and without him was made  
not anything that was made.

1:3.

And in his letter to the Colossians Paul asserts:

For in him all things were created,  
in heaven and on earth  
visible and invisible,  
Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers.

1:16

The redemptive history was not revealed in its chronological sequence—that is, what happened before creation; then the history of Israel; finally, the coming of Christ. Nor did the first Christians understand the entire process in this sequence, or by starting at the end and working back. “The mid-point is also the starting point of primitive Christian understanding; starting from that mid-point, the divine plan of salvation opened up in both a forward and backward direction” (*Time* 105). The process of Christian perception must be conceived in harmony with the pattern of movement presupposed by our reckoning of time, counting backward and forward from the Christ-event.

The time line therefore is actually constructed from the mid-point. The entire line is a Christ line and “we should not begin to speak of Christ only at some fixed point part way along the line, as though previously one could speak only of God, without reference to Christ” (*ibid* 108).

Christ was foreordained as mediator before the creation and he was mediator in the creation; the election of Israel took

place with reference to him and reached its fulfillment in his work. Christ's role as mediator continues in his Church, his mystical body. Christ must be therefore the mediator of the completion of the entire redemptive plan at the end of time. And Christ's mediatorship is not restricted to mankind but extends to the whole universe, even to the cosmos itself.

"This is why he returns to the earth; the new creation at the end, like the entire redemptive process, is linked to that redemption of men whose mediator is Christ" (ibid 109). Christ stands at the center of all phases of salvation history. The creation, redemption and final consummation depend on him. And "this fulfillment will be nothing less than the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13). This is why Christ will return to earth. The decisive event, like the first decisive event which took place under Pontius Pilate, will take place on earth, because matter itself has to be recreated" (*Return* 147).

The time of the Church, after the resurrection and before the parousia, is an intermediate time, in a sense. Salvation has been won but not all its effects have worked themselves out. Radically the power of evil has been overcome, for Jesus has risen from the dead, but the power of evil has not been brought into total subjection. The decisive battle has been won but the war goes on.

The first fruits—the graces of the Holy Spirit—have been given, but not the capital sum. When the consummation comes however the spirit (pneuma) will lay hold of the entire world of the flesh (sarx). So far only Christ's body has risen to become a spiritual body. At the consummation however the Spirit which already dwells in us will also lay hold of our mortal bodies

(Rom 8:11). The Jewish eschatology did not take place in a purely other worldly sphere, and this remains true of the Christian eschatology as well. And the Christian eschatological drama must take place in a setting that includes the earth. The Spirit, which in a preliminary way, in baptism, has laid hold only of the inner man, will then create anew the whole of matter which has fallen into the state of sinful flesh. "Just as the decision in Jesus Christ has already occurred upon earth, so even more must the completion take place precisely upon earth" (*Time* 142).

Since it includes both creation and consummation and the salvific plan that lies between on the one temporal line, and also the unlimited line that stretches beyond beginning and end, the one redemptive line includes both verifiable occurrences and things beyond the reach of historical testing. Primitive Christianity however made no distinction between these two classes of items.

While the primal and eschatological histories may not be fully subject to historical testing, this deficiency does not imply that the events they record are not temporal. If these histories are cut loose from the more historical parts of the plan of salvation, "the line as such would then be destroyed; the history of the primal beginning and of the eschatological drama at the end would then have to be loosed, as being timeless, from that connection with the time development" (ibid 95). But these histories are robbed of their New Testament significance when no account is taken of their connection with what lies between. "Thus R. Bultmann has at least a more correct view when he

consistently treats the redemptive process as a whole and demands that the same method of 'stripping away mythology' be applied also to the section of the line that is accessible to historical study" (ibid 96).

In primitive Christianity the connection between the historical events concerning Jesus of Nazareth and the nonhistorical account of the primal beginning and of the eschatological end is so close that the difference in historicity is unimportant. The reason is not because primitive Christianity possessed no historical sense, but because it possessed a positive theological outlook that transcended the contrast. This outlook is the concept of prophecy. "The stories of the beginning and the end are only prophecy, while the middle section, which is open in part to historical testing, is prophecy of a kind that refers to facts that can be historically established, and it makes these facts an object of faith" (ibid 97).

Barr's *Semantics of Biblical Language* and especially his *Biblical Words for Time* have recently caused Cullmann's many admirers much uneasiness.<sup>12</sup> At the very least it has to be admitted that Barr supplies a necessary corrective to a procedure quite common in recent biblical theology. And his criticism raises an interesting point regarding the relationship between biblical theology and other branches of theology.

Some of Barr's own critics have not paid sufficient attention to his declarations that his criticism is not directed against biblical theology as such but only against this certain procedure. Others complain that these avowals are not put strongly enough to prevent the works from having the appearance of an attack on biblical theology.

The last thirty years has seen a great revival of biblical theology,

Barr notes in his *Biblical Words for Time*. This revival has meant not only a renewed attention to the theological significance of the bible, but in particular an interest in bringing out the unity and distinctiveness of biblical theology. Barr states that it is not his purpose to discuss or to criticize these main interests and concerns of the study. The purpose of his work "is a much more limited one: to examine one particular procedure, and only one. . . . This procedure is the building of a structure from the lexical stock of the biblical languages, and the assumption that the shape of this structure reflects or sets forth the outlines of biblical thinking about a subject. The subject in this case is time" (op cit 12).

This point is underlined at the conclusion of Barr's study on time. He emphasizes that his criticism "does not in itself prove that Cullmann is wrong in holding eternity to be unlimited time, and not something other than time, for it may be that there are philosophical and theological reasons for holding this even if the linguistic ones are faulty" (ibid 145). The question is whether this investigation can be pursued on a purely biblical basis if revelation is restricted to a written source. In a similar vein, Barr opines that Cullmann's christology is on a different footing altogether (ibid 81), and is independent of the lexical procedure.

The procedure Barr criticizes—the building of a structure from the lexical stock of the biblical languages—assumes that the shape of this structure reflects the outline of biblical thinking about the particular subject in question. He cites the example of Edmond Jacob,<sup>13</sup> who assembles a series of Hebrew words for man and holds that each of these words typifies or emphasizes

or brings out a particular aspect of the Hebrew understanding of man. The contrast of Greek and Hebrew thought, and deductions drawn from the Hebrew tense system, Jacob regards as part of the same procedure.

What Barr objects to is the belief that "the words for an entity form a structure or pattern from which the structure of thought about the entity can be read off . . . that biblical language contained patterns symmorphous with the outlines of biblical-Christian thought" (op cit 131). The fact that there are pairs of words with some differences in meaning does not mean that a philosophical distinction is the origin of the existence of the varying terms (ibid 106). Specifically Cullmann is wrong in assuming that, because certain differences of meaning exist between *kairos* and *chronos* (*aion*) in certain contexts, "they are always or indeed ever used to point or express a systematic distinction of the philosophical-theological type" (ibid 107). Therefore Cullmann is left without any basis for his main thesis: that eternity is not other than time, but that it is a continuum or totality of time.

From this hypothesis Barr goes on to make a point that certainly has general acceptance: "A valid theology can be built only upon the statements of the Bible, and not on the words of the Bible" (ibid 147). Or as he says elsewhere: "Linguistically, it is the syntactical complexes, in which the lexical items are used, and not the lexical terms themselves, which constitute communication" (ibid 155). It is on this basis that Barr distinguishes between Cullmann's *Christology of the New Testament* and his *Christ and Time*. The point Barr makes is a cogent one.

On the other hand there are reasons to believe that *Christ*

*and Time* is still relevant to modern biblical scholarship. This author maintains that Cullmann's distinction between cyclic (nonbiblical) and linear (biblical) time still holds. But it is necessary to add that the linear concept of time arose from revelation and not from any philosophical speculation or linguistic development; rather it imposed itself on the lexical stock. The fact that Barr can cite some passages where *kairos* seems convertible with *chronos* does not clinch his argument, for rigid consistency is not the bible's most notable quality.

In a review of *Semantics of Biblical Language*<sup>14</sup> B. S. Childs says that "the chief weakness of the book lies in the failure to appreciate the dimension of tradition in exegesis." Description semantics is not enough, he argues. What is needed is a method which seeks to recover the institutions which shaped Israel's patterns of oral tradition. "The proper task of a word study is to determine its original context within the life of ancient Israel or the early church and from this broader perspective to discover the scope as well as the change in meaning of the word." Childs finds it hard to accept the thesis that Christianity had no creative or transforming influence on the language of the New Testament.

As we mentioned above, Barr states a number of times that it is not his purpose to discuss or criticize the main interests and concerns of biblical theology. Moreover at the end of *Biblical Words for Time* he states that his criticism "does not in itself prove that Cullmann is wrong in holding eternity to be unlimited time, and not something other than time, for it may be that there are philosophical and theological reasons for holding this even if the linguistic ones are faulty" (op cit 145).



Cullmann, says Barr, professes to reject philosophy and philosophical argument in his approach to time and to regard the concrete biblical material as the sole foundation of truth. Actually, Barr continues, there is a "very serious shortage within the Bible of the kind of actual statement about 'time' or 'eternity' which could form a sufficient basis for a Christian philosophical-theological view of time. It is the lack of actual statements about what time is like, more than anything else, that has forced exegetes into trying to get a view of time out of the words themselves" (ibid 131f).

Barr's conclusion is that it is a mistake to consider this problem within the scope of biblical exegesis at all. The handling of the problem "should lie not directly within the biblical area but rather within a philosophical theology, which, while recognizing biblical authority, would not claim to be biblical exegesis" (ibid 14). "If we follow Cullmann in his strict adherence to a biblical basis and his rigorous exclusion of philosophy and of traditional theology beyond the biblical area, and if this forces us into the lexical methods here criticized as the only means of reaching biblical thought, then the alternative is to recognize that the subject is not a genuine biblical theme, and that on the principle of adherence to a strict biblical basis nothing can be said about it" (157).

### *Jesus' Self-Disclosure*

A third line of possible development in eschatology lies in a more intensive study of Jesus' manifestation of himself. This study

of course would have to take into consideration the other lines already mentioned (Jesus and the apocalyptic, the consistently temporal nature of the salvation line) and any other factor that enables us to discern or reconstruct the process of Jesus' disclosure of himself to the world.

We have fairly well recovered from the disillusionment following the collapse of the "historical Jesus" line of investigation. So much so that there is now a rather widespread conviction that, wiser now for the experience, it is time to take up again the effort to produce an unbiased life of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> This life will of course always be far less detailed than we would like. In fact, it is likely that less progress will be made here than in other related studies of Jesus' self-disclosure.

If we are sufficiently wary of possible retrojection, we can already glimpse from the gospels the main outline of this process of self-disclosure. Using familiar concepts and idioms, Jesus had to make a gradual, distinctive disclosure. While revealing himself as the realization of the Old Testament promises and hopes, he had to give those hopes a new direction and dimension. He was the promised messiah but not the kind of messiah most of his contemporaries were expecting; he was the promised messiah but he was also the suffering servant and the son of man.

By his miracles and by his preaching, especially in the beatitudes and parables, Jesus gradually made it known that in him the eschatological age had arrived. Yet so carefully was this disclosure made that it provoked no uprisings against the Roman power. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi marks an important stage in this preparation. Yet, the apostles' con-

duct during the passion and even after the resurrection indicates that they never fully grasped until the Pentecost the precise nature of Jesus' messiahship.

In his preaching and instruction during his public ministry, Jesus had paved the way for the full understanding that was to come with the outpouring of the Spirit. He did this by linking messianic expectations with other concepts—suffering servant and son of man especially—which, taken together, suggested the true nature of his office. While the apostles and disciples either could not or would not take all this to heart while Jesus was with them, apparently even after the resurrection, they came to realize it under the impact of the Holy Spirit.

It is impossible for us to determine which truths Jesus inculcated during his public ministry, and in what order. Certainly he taught that he was the messiah, the son of man, the suffering servant. It is also clear that he prepared his followers for his death and resurrection as well as possible under the circumstances. He also must have spoken of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, since this was so much involved in the passage from the old age to the new.

On the other hand he did not attempt to impart a complete and detailed picture of his own role and mission and the kingdom of salvation he came to found. He may well have spoken of all those things in general terms which would become quite meaningful in the light of later events. But, generally speaking, more detailed instruction by Jesus would have been of little worth to persons who were already experiencing difficulty in grasping the full meaning of his words about the basic aspects of his kingdom. Under these circumstances it would seem

that the doctrine of the last things would hardly be introduced by Jesus in his preaching.

No matter how we interpret the New Testament evidence, it is an inescapable fact that Jesus gave the apostles and disciples additional personal instruction following the resurrection. Some exegetes, however, prefer to call this teaching post-ascension instruction.

The theory of the originally indivisible experience is basic to fully realized eschatology: resurrection, exaltation and the second advent were originally aspects of one idea. Other exegetes and theologians admit the identification with regard to the first two elements without attempting to account for the parousia belief on the same score and holding for an historical parousia. This manner of identification is not an impossible position, but there is still much to be said for an ascension that is temporally as well as theologically distinct.

New Testament writers agree that the descent of the Holy Spirit came after Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, but there are two versions of the time and manner of the Spirit's coming. Mark and Luke separate the ascension from the resurrection by forty days of resurrection appearances. Luke also separates it from the subsequent descent of the Spirit, which he represents as taking place seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection.

From John on the other hand one gets the impression that the resurrection, ascension and giving of the Spirit occurred on the same day. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalen in the early morning (20:17) and tells her: "Go to my brethren and say to them: 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father.'" Then, late that

same day, the risen Jesus appears in the disciples' midst, "breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit' " (v 22).

The evidence of Paul agrees with the johannine rather than the lucan view. "It is probable that the Johannine account preserves the more primitive apostolic teaching in this matter," Alan Richardson writes.<sup>16</sup> The lucan scheme he regards as "an imaginative reconstruction of the historical happenings," based on theological reflection. The three events that Luke distinguishes should be regarded as theologically rather than as temporally distinct.

But the fact remains that the Church constructed her calendar on Luke's model. It has been shown that Luke is concerned with theological interpretation,<sup>17</sup> but if asked to choose between John's bringing together and Luke's dividing, this author would be inclined to choose the former. And it is worth noting that "John holds closely together the lifting up on the cross and the exaltation, the lifting up into glory."<sup>18</sup> If the ascension and the Spirit's coming were not satellites of the originally indivisible experience, there is small chance of accounting for the parousia belief on this basis.

The two ideas, fully realized eschatology and growth, do not go well together. Yet as C. S. C. Williams notes in his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles: "It is probably true that the Galilean mind of the first century never envisaged the conception of evolution, and yet it is equally true that in a peasant community all were aware of the organic unity between seed and fruit or harvest. . . . It can no longer be said that a doctrine of the Church is not an integral part of the Gospel. By choosing

and commissioning the Twelve, by bidding His disciples to share in His suffering in order to enter into His glory, by the common meals, especially by the Last Supper, He made the Church proleptically present just as by His saving acts He made the Kingdom of God proleptically present in 'this Age' as opposed to the 'coming Age.'"<sup>19</sup>

Whether we prefer to speak of post-resurrection or post-ascension appearances, we do know that Jesus continued the apostles' formation after his resurrection. From Luke 24:44-49 and similar passages we learn that while Jesus was yet with them, he showed them from the scriptures why certain things happened as they had, and spoke of the task that lay ahead of them. We can only conjecture as to whether or not he spoke of the last things more explicitly at this time than he had before.

Whether or not Jesus made any new revelations about the last things during the time he was with them, it was nonetheless inevitable that the pentecostal witness took the form that it did. The apostles grasped and proclaimed the great mystery as an indivisible experience; Jesus of Nazareth had been exalted. Jesus now reigned as lord and messiah, at the Father's right hand, as the savior of all, as the judge of the living and the dead.

It may be that there was no clear reference in this kerygma to a second coming. Even if Jesus had given the apostles explicit instructions in this regard, the pentecostal proclamation they actually made would have been the only understandable one under the circumstances. And this outlook would perdure as long as the fire of the Spirit continued to make itself felt. As Graham Neville states it: while the parousia was an integral part of the Christian preaching, an effective gospel could

have been presented without any emphasis on it. "It was, however, not a complete gospel, however effective it may have been when the Church's life was signally marked with the evidence of the Spirit's power."<sup>20</sup>

After it had achieved its purpose the charismatic note gradually grew fainter, and Christian life found the level that was to characterize the time of the Church as a whole. As the brilliance of Pentecost receded details hitherto unstressed began to emerge into view, among them the doctrine of the last things. From the apostles' conduct during and after the passion we can see that they simply had not taken to heart a number of things which Jesus had preached to them during his time with them. The case may well have been the same with regard to his eschatological teaching.

But it does not seem likely that Jesus would have developed this subject in any detail before the passion. And even if he had done so in the interval between resurrection and ascension, it is understandable that eschatology was not stressed in the first proclamation of the kerygma.

The parousia is most definitely in 1 Thessalonians although, as Robinson points out, Paul never explicitly declared that it was a part of the tradition he had received. Yet it is still possible that the parousia was part of the Church's tradition, springing from the teaching of Jesus himself, but was thrown into the background by the other, more timely elements of the kerygma. This obscurity could well have shaped Paul's attitude toward the parousia as part of the tradition that he had received.

But let us presuppose that Jesus did not give any explicit in-

structions on the precise nature of the consummation or announce that there was to be a second coming. He would have spoken of the future, of course, but only in general terms. In this case the second coming would not at first have formed part of the Church's teaching. It would have become part of the Church's teaching only after a lapse of some time. Yet at the same time it is possible to maintain that this development was perfectly legitimate and that the second coming was to become an integral part of the Church's genuine teaching.

There should be no difficulty involved in this problem for anyone who accords the Church a real teaching authority or believes that a development of dogma is possible. Moreover, in this instance we are concerned with the apostolic age, when new revelations were still possible.

Why did this doctrine not develop in much the same way that nearly all later doctrinal developments took place? There is doctrinal development whenever a question arises to which an answer has yet to be found. The second coming could be the answer to such a question arising out of a number of Jesus' other teachings and the course of historical events.

In nearly all the other doctrinal developments we find first the recognition of a dilemma; then attempts at a solution, mostly failures; followed by discussion, argument and even controversy. Out of this method there eventually emerged both a true orthodox doctrine and a number of heresies. Today our concept of inspiration is fully capable of embracing this process of striving toward the truth.<sup>21</sup>

In his *Birth of the New Testament* Moule has gone a long way toward drawing this mass of considerations into a compre-



hensible picture. In Old Testament times, he notes, idolaters had pointed derisively to Israel's empty shrine and asked: "Where is your God?" And the Israelites had answered: "Our God is in the heavens" (Ps 115:3). So also under the new dispensation were Christians asked what had become of the messiah whom they alleged to have risen from the dead. Christians had to explain the invisibility of their Lord and the evident fact that his reign of peace had not yet been fully established.

In Moule's opinion Acts and John 21 indicate that there was a period "after the crucifixion"<sup>22</sup> during which Jesus showed himself alive to chosen witnesses. These witnesses entertained hopes that at any moment Jesus would "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6).

"When this hope proved illusory, and he was finally and decisively withdrawn from sight, they looked forward to a very speedy return. And the vivid manifestation of power and confidence at Pentecost was hailed as an interim gift from the exalted Lord, until the consummation of God's plan, when Jesus would return (Acts 2:33; 3:21).

"And there is little doubt that this was the prevailing pattern of expectations for a long time—as indeed, *mutatis mutandis* (and *extensis extendendis*), it still is in many Christian hearts to this day: Christ, exalted to God's throne in heaven, destined to descend again at the end, and in the meantime represented on earth by apportionings of his Spirit and power; the Church, meanwhile, being charged with the task of spreading the good news and winning converts."<sup>23</sup>

This belief was also the pattern of Paul's expectations throughout his extant epistles: to be incorporated in Christ was to

possess a citizenship in heaven, whence Christ would come as savior. Even John's gospel does not represent a complete exchange of future expectations for present realization. While he places the emphasis on Jesus as the present source of life, John "does not deny a general resurrection at the last day or a coming of the Lord at the end."<sup>24</sup>

"There is nothing here to replace the corporate consummation of the whole People of God as a future event. And it is becoming clear that it would be a gross oversimplification to arrange New Testament eschatology as an evolutionary tree, with a primitive parousia expectation at its roots, with Paul as an important transitional stem, and with the Fourth Gospel as the ripe fruit of developed and integrated thinking at the top."<sup>25</sup>

Christian speculation about the demonic angel-powers indicates that the Church recognized it was living in an interim stage, awaiting the final consummation. The evangelization of the world had to be achieved before the consummation could be effected, but there was a variety of opinions as to how this was to be carried out, and this variety found expression in varying eschatologies.

"Some groups perhaps saw the conversion of the Jews as the first necessity before any further spread of the gospel; others, led by Paul, looked for the reverse process: only when the full complement of Gentiles had come would all Israel be saved (Rom 11:25). Some looked to human labor, others expected a supernatural intervention. To postulate this diversity of organization and of expectation goes some way toward accounting for

the diverse traditions that seem to be reflected in such a writing as Matthew's gospel."<sup>26</sup>

The Christian hope was not to be measured primarily in terms of lapse of time, but in terms of the working out of what had already been given in the incarnation. "Thus, the future (in detail) was never the primary concern; it was the past leading to the present that occupied the attention of Christians when they were really Christian. And consequently, it is a mistake to read the New Testament as though the 'delay of the parousia' were a conditioning factor of essential importance—still worse to measure the chronological sequence of the writings by supposed developments depending upon it. There may be—there probably are—developments in emphasis: but the general program of expectation varies little."<sup>27</sup>

## Footnotes

### Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> A. Jones, "The Gospel and the Gospels," *Scripture* XII, 65, July 1960, 66.
- <sup>2</sup> J. Muilenburg, "Isaiah," *Interpreter's Bible* 5, Nashville 1956, 610.
- <sup>3</sup> E. Osty, "L'Evangile selon Saint Luc," *Jerusalem Bible*, Paris 1953, 50; cf. S. Gilmour, "St. Luke," *Interpreter's Bible* 8, Nashville 1952, 89.
- <sup>4</sup> According to the LXX and Luke's translation. Cf. Gilmour, op cit 91.
- <sup>5</sup> A. Richardson, *Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, New York 1960, 100.
- <sup>6</sup> J. Huby, X. Léon-Dufour, *L'Evangile et les Evangiles*, Paris 1954, 5.
- <sup>7</sup> D. Stanley, "Conception of Salvation in Primitive Christian Preaching," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XVIII, 3, July 1956, 238.
- <sup>8</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*, New York 1944, 21-23.
- <sup>9</sup> O. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, Philadelphia 1959, 14f.
- <sup>10</sup> Stanley, op cit 252.

### Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> Stanley, op cit 248.
- <sup>2</sup> Jones, op cit 68.
- <sup>3</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, New York 1951, 66f.
- <sup>4</sup> Jones, op cit 69.
- <sup>5</sup> P. Fannon, "Formation of the Gospels," *Scripture* XII, 112, October 1960, 115.
- <sup>6</sup> Jones, op cit 73.
- <sup>7</sup> Fannon, op cit 115.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid 114.
- <sup>9</sup> 48.
- <sup>10</sup> Bishop Cassian, "The Interrelation of the Gospels: Matthew-Luke-John," *Studia Evangelica*, K. Aland et al (ed), Berlin 1959, 129-147.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Birth of the New Testament*, New York 1962, 121f.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid 184.

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<sup>13</sup> Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*, 54.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 53.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, op cit 65.

<sup>16</sup> P. Fannon, "Can We Know Jesus?" *Scripture* XIII, 22, April 1961, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 40.

<sup>18</sup> V. Taylor, *Life and Ministry of Jesus*, Nashville 1955, 37, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p 37.

## Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> Cf Fannon, "Formation of the Gospels," 115.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, "Gospel and Gospels," 73.

<sup>3</sup> Dodd, *Gospel and Law* 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Les Béatitudes*, Louvain 1954, 2nd ed, vol 1, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Dupont, 2nd ed, 10f.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 218.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 259.

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> Ibid 15.

<sup>2</sup> Dupont, 1st ed, 127.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 141f.

<sup>4</sup> *Key Concepts of the Old Testament*, New York, 91.

<sup>5</sup> K. Schubert, *The Dead Sea Community*, New York 1959, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Philadelphia 1959, 117f.

<sup>7</sup> Dibelius, op cit 106f.

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men*, New York 1961, 274.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Parables of the Kingdom*, New York 1961, 1.

<sup>4</sup> J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, New York 1955, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 17f.

<sup>6</sup> A. van der Born (ed), *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*, Tornhout 1960, 1331.

<sup>7</sup> A. Richardson (ed), *Theological Word Book of the Bible*, New York 1960, 162.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>8</sup> Cf Dodd, op cit 5f.

<sup>9</sup> "The Parables of Jesus as Self-Revelation," *Studia Evangelica*, Berlin 1959, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 81.

<sup>11</sup> Op cit 144.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 147.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 151.

<sup>14</sup> *Parables of the Kingdom* 85.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 18f.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 105.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 166.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 120.

<sup>19</sup> 88.

### Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> V. Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, New York 1959, 250.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremias, op cit 12, n 11.

<sup>3</sup> V. Taylor, *Life and Ministry of Jesus* 103.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 104.

<sup>5</sup> Op cit 151.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson, op cit 95.

<sup>7</sup> Cf van der Born, op cit 1231.

<sup>8</sup> J. von Allmen (ed), *Companion to the Bible*, New York 1958, 276.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 278.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremias, op cit 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Teaching of Jesus*, Cambridge 1935, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremias, op cit 14.

<sup>13</sup> Oxford 1961, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Manson, op cit 79.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Life and Ministry of Jesus* 104.

<sup>16</sup> A. Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, New York 1958, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 59.

<sup>18</sup> *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London 1961, 42; cf 38-95.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, *Theological Word Book* 108.

<sup>20</sup> Richardson, *Theology of the New Testament* 93.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 94.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 60.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 61.

<sup>24</sup> von Allmen, op cit 277 (M. Bouttier).

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### Chapter 7

- <sup>1</sup> *Jesus and His Coming*, New York 1957, 118.
- <sup>2</sup> Englewood Cliffs 1957, 470.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid 470f.
- <sup>4</sup> English tr London 1911.
- <sup>5</sup> F. Filson, *Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord*, New York 1956, 103.
- <sup>6</sup> Dodd, *Parables* vii.
- <sup>7</sup> Filson, op cit 103f.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid 103.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Apostolic Preaching* 39.
- <sup>10</sup> *Parables* 34.
- <sup>11</sup> *Christ and Time*, Philadelphia 1950, 84f.
- <sup>12</sup> O. Cullmann, "The Return of Christ," *The Early Church*, Philadelphia 1956, 144, n 3.
- <sup>13</sup> "Realized Eschatology: An Exposition of Charles H. Dodd's Thesis," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 1962, 1-2, 44-70.
- <sup>14</sup> Op cit 44.
- <sup>15</sup> Wolfzorn, op cit 48.
- <sup>16</sup> *Parables* 87.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid 101.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Apostolic Preaching* 33.
- <sup>19</sup> Wolfzorn, op cit 45.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid 52.
- <sup>21</sup> Cambridge 1953, 447, n 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf Wolfzorn, op cit 44.

### Chapter 8

- <sup>1</sup> *Studies in Biblical Theology*, London 1961.
- <sup>2</sup> Richmond 1962, 291f.
- <sup>3</sup> *Studies in Biblical Theology*, Chicago 1954.
- <sup>4</sup> Op cit 101.

### Chapter 9

- <sup>1</sup> New York 1950.

### Chapter 10

- <sup>1</sup> London.
- <sup>2</sup> "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel," *Studia Evangelica* 347.

FOOTNOTES

*Chapter 11*

- <sup>1</sup> Philadelphia 1955, 1957.
- <sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention, Catholic Theological Society of America, 48f.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid 49.
- <sup>4</sup> Jean Levie, *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men*, New York 1961, 273.
- <sup>5</sup> London 1957.
- <sup>6</sup> Levie, op cit 281-283.
- <sup>7</sup> London 1962, 733-747.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Early Church*, Philadelphia 1956, 141-62.
- <sup>9</sup> Philadelphia 1950.
- <sup>10</sup> *Studies in Biblical Theology*, no 33, Naperville, Ill. 1962.
- <sup>11</sup> A Stock, *Lamb of God*, New York 1963, 85-88.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf *New Testament Abstracts* 6, no 3, 1962, 367f; 7, no 1, 101f; no 2, 235f.
- <sup>13</sup> *Theology of the Old Testament*, London 1958, 156f.
- <sup>14</sup> *Journal of Biblical Literature*, December 1961, 80, part 4, 374-77.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Naperville, Ill. 1959.
- <sup>16</sup> *Theology of the New Testament* 114.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, New York 1960.
- <sup>18</sup> Rust, op cit 225.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, New York 1957, 284f.
- <sup>20</sup> Op cit 91.
- <sup>21</sup> Levie, op cit 215.
- <sup>22</sup> 97.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid 97f.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid 94.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid 98.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid 172.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid 103.